

In the Cause of the People

Reminiscences

A. K. Gopalan

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Abbreviations & Explanations

MLA Member of Legislative [State] Assembly responsible for passing laws governing the state.

MP Member of [National] Parliament responsible for passing laws governing India.

CPI Communist Party of India. This is considered the rightist communist party as it collaborated with Indira Gandhi who stood for the interests of the landed & business classes.

KSTUC Kerala State Trade Union Congress. Trade union associated with Communist Party of India.

AITUC All India Trade Union Congress. Trade union federation associated with Communist Party of India.

CPI(M)/CPIM/CPM Communist Party of India (Marxist). This is considered left Communist Party of India as it broke away from original Communist Party of India

ABBREVIATIONS & EXPLANATIONS

(CPI) when CPI has collaborated with Indira Gandhi who deployed *socialist* rhetoric while still representing the interests of Capitalists & Landlord classes. This is why CPI is considered as *rightist* by CPI(M) as they collaborated with economic rightwing (Indira Gandhi) at the insistence of Soviet Union that wanted Indira Gandhi to win elections.

Congress(R) Indian National **Congress (Requisitionists)**.

In 1969 Congress was split into two factions. Congress(R) of Indira Gandhi (daughter of Nehru). Other group is Indian National Congress (Organisation) or Congress(O) which merged with Janata Party which is the predecessor of **Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)**. When Indira Gandhi lost 2nd term election on Congress(R) party ticket, she started her own party again called Congress(I) aka Congress Indira. Post her election victory on Congress(I) ticket, election commission (influenced by Indira) declared Congress(I) to be real Indian National Congress(INC).

CSP **Congress Socialist Party**. A branch of socialist Congress party during independence struggle that claimed to represent socialism as opposed to its main wing which was composed off Capitalists & Landlords.

AICC **All India Congress Committee**. Executive body of Indian National Congress (INC) at National level.

PCC **Pradesh Congress Committee**. Executive body of Indian National Congress (INC) at each State level.

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KPCC Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. Executive body of Indian National Congress (INC) at Kerala State level.

INTUC Indian National Trade Union Congress. Its the trade union wing of the Indian National Congress.

SSP Samyukta Socialist Party.

RSP Revolutionary Socialist Party of Kerala (Bolshevik).

IST Indian Socialist Party.

KTP Karshaka Thozhilali Party.

IUML/League Indian Union Muslim League.

KSP Kerala Socialist Party

DMK Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. Its a political party which has a major influence on the state of Tamil Nadu and the union territory of Puducherry.

NSS Nair Service Society.

SNDP Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam.

UF United Front.

CrPC Criminal Procedure Code. Law prescribing the set of procedures to be followed by legal system for a criminal complaint thru out its life time — all the way from complaint to disposal.

ABBREVIATIONS & EXPLANATIONS

IPC **I**ndian **P**enal **C**ode. Law that describes list of crimes & their punishment.

Section 144 IPC Section of the Indian Penal Code used by police to restrict civil liberties under the guise of security to stop protests & declare assembly of citizens (for protest) to be illegal.

IAS **I**ndian **A**dministrative **S**ervice. A classification within Indian Bureaucracy (responsible for taxation, implementing govt schemes and law & order) who hold higher positions in Indian Administration both at National & State level. One has to clear an All-India exam to become a member of this group.

CID **C**riminal **I**nvigation **D**epartment. Its the branch of State Police Services of India responsible for the investigation of crime.

RDO **R**evenue **D**epartment **O**fficial responsible for tax collection.

ADM **A**dditional **D**istrict **M**agistrate. District Magistrate is responsible for law & order activities within an administrative division (usually a district). Usually this person is IAS cadre officer.

IPS **I**ndian **P**olice **S**ervice. A classification within Indian Police (responsible for law & order) who hold higher positions in Policing across India. One has to clear an All-India exam to become a member of this group.

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ASP Assistant Superintendent of Police. Usually represents a mid-level officer of Police hierarchy in India.

DSP Deputy Superintendent of Police. Usually represents a mid-level officer of Police hierarchy in India. Belongs to IPS cadre.

IG Inspector General. Also called Inspector General of Police (IGP). Belongs to IPS cadre. Usually represents a member of the top few levels of Police hierarchy in India.

MSP Malabar Special Police. Branch of State Police in Kerala responsible for restoring “law & order”. In reality, it has always been a tool of political & economic rulers to impose themselves on people thru violence aka tool of State to terrorise people. Now part of Kerala Police.

SAP Special Armed Police. An armed police force created in 1958 in Travancore-Cochin State. Now part of Kerala Police.

INA Indian National Army was an armed force formed by a section of Indians who wanted to secure freedom from British by collaborating with Axis powers (Germany, Italy, Japan, ...). Its fought alongside Japanese soldiers against British in South Asia. Was led by Subhas Chandra Bose.

RIN mutiny Royal Indian Navy mutiny/revolt. Post WW2—in 1946—Indian naval workers conducted a

ABBREVIATIONS & EXPLANATIONS

revolt against British Government during the struggle for Independence from British.

NATO The North Atlantic Treaty Organization. A military alliance between US, UK & Europe.

UP Utter Pradesh. A State in India.

BA Bachelor of Arts

MA Master of Arts

LLB Bachelor of Laws (Legum Baccalaureus; LL.B) is an undergraduate law degree.

EMS Elamkulam Manakkal Sankaran Namboodiripad. Indian Communist politician who served as the first Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957–59 and then again in 1967–69.

AKG Ayillyath Kuttiari Gopalan. Also known as A. K. Gopalan or AKG, was an Indian communist politician. Author of this book.

PREFACE

This book records the reminiscences of my life, particularly of the four decades of my political career. As such, it is crowded with memories of the independence movement, struggles of the working class movement, jails, police firings and party activities. In writing these memoirs, I have not attempted to provide an accurate historical record of past events; it is more of a personal account. Hence there may be factual errors or other lapses as my memory is not very clear about certain dates and circumstances. I must also mention that being a full-time political activist, my style of writing may leave much to be desired and I hope the reader will remember my limitations. A part of this book—upto 1957—came out years ago in Malayalam, and now I have revised and updated the account. In doing so, I have not paid much attention to my activities in Parliament, as they are less important than my work outside.

I hope this book will be instructive to the readers, in its limited way, about the experiences and the course of the left and democratic movement in the country, and that they will be benefited by it. I must thank Karat Prakash and Narikutty

PREFACE

Mohanan for help in preparing the book. I must also express my gratitude to Orient Longman Ltd., for the interest they have taken in its publication.

New Delhi,

A. K. GOPALAN
December, 1956

Chapter 1

I was born on 1st October 1904 in the village of Makheri in Mavilai in the Chirakkal sub-district of North Malabar. The Nair joint family of Ayillyath was originally a ruling family. The actual Ayillyath family got divided into three families—Aroth, Kandoth and Pallyath. A further division created the branch called Kuttiari and that was how I became Ayillyath Kuttiari Gopalan Nambiar.

The *twin house* Nair family was a ruling family even before the East India Company appeared in our country. The company honoured them with the titles of *All Honoured* and *Half Honoured*. This only meant that some properties were taxfree, while others were only half so. In the family were a whole range of officers from District Judge down to Elementary School Teachers. The family members were so many that they could not know each other. Some introduced themselves to me at times with the words *Do you know me? I am your brother*.

The head of the family was the seniormost member. He lived in the central house or *Tharavad*. Other family members could also live there. Those who did were served rice gruel

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for breakfast and meals at noon and night. Those who did not report in time might not get anything at all. Sometimes, the latecomers got their *curry* with plenty of water. In brief it was something like a community hostel.

It was the family head who collected land rent. The share of each member was fixed. Each one got 265 seers of paddy annually and 25 rupees. If any one died, the share would increase slightly. Those who lived in the family ate there. To the others the head or *Karnava* sent their share of the income. The family had its own physician, launderer and barber. They were paid an annual salary. Such was life in the matrilineal family. It was quite common for the nephews to be jealous of the Karnavar and his wife and children if they were better off than the others, and to feel unfriendly towards them.

I lived with my father. I grew up from early childhood in an atmosphere different from that of other homes. Father was one of the social reformers of the time. It was he who gave me the first opportunity to take part in public affairs and to associate myself with the people.

At a place called Kadachira in North Malabar, father had started an English Middle School. Sixty years ago it was not an easy task to establish an English School in a village like that. And there was not even enough encouragement for such a venture. When my sisters also were sent to the school, the conservatives became angry. It was simply unthinkable to them that girls dressed in the modern style should go to school along with boys. Quite differently from other boys, my brothers and I used to go to school in shirt, trousers and wearing a cap. We were conspicuous in this. Because of

conservative opposition and the absence of encouragement, the school soon functioned at the elementary level only. It is a matter of pride that this school has created many public men as well as well-known lawyers like K. T. Chandu Nambiar.

Father was Secretary of the North Malabar Nair Society from its very inception. Its main concern was to eradicate caste subdivision among Nairs and to do away with *thali-tying* and other social evils. It was because of the work of this Society that *thali-tying* disappeared completely. Father suffered a lot of opposition in this work too. I took part, along with him, in the conferences and meetings of the Society. Moreover, I entered the stage and did some actual field work in the Nair Society campaign. I noted father's humorous speeches which made a deep impression on my mind.

Father edited a publication called Friend of Industry which was originally entitled Light of Community. Friend of Industry was at first a weekly. Because support was lacking, it was later changed into a monthly. It had its own press. Kavimani K. C. Kuttappa Nambiar, Neelancherry Sankaran Nair, K. T. Raman Nambiar and others blossomed through the columns of this magazine. It became my task whenever I was free to attend to printing work, to go through the newspapers, re-write articles, compile local news-notes, write subscribers' addresses and maintain registers. Father's younger brother was a good singer and actor. The young people of the place who had taste for stage-acting were brought together and a drama troupe was organised. Father too was an actor in this troupe. The troupe used to tour Wayanad and other places annually for performances. I was

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also attracted to this work and I used to attend performances near my house.

It was father who first started diversified farming in our locality. In addition to paddy, groundnut and sugarcane were cultivated on a large scale. These experiments instilled in the people an awareness of the need for agricultural reforms. This attracted my attention. Father was one of the elected members of the first Board of Chirakkal sub-district. Although the election was non-political I was keen on taking part in the campaign in defeating his rival. When the election was over, I could see how much the public loved and trusted father. I also had an occasion to meet the voters. Father used to take interest in the public needs of the sub-district, like construction of bridges and drainage and the establishment of Elementary Schools. To me all these were elementary lessons in public work.

I was not too earnest as a student, but did work hard for one or two weeks prior to the examinations. And there were plenty of opportunities for copying during examinations! I had no ambitions of becoming a lawyer, a judge or a doctor. The only kind of job that attracted me was one in which I would be free and available to work amidst the people.

I was the leader of the bad boys in the school. Our gang used to arbitrate on quarrels among boys and settle their disputes with teachers. The consideration being *Tea* from both complainant and accused. I was keen on preventing big boys from bullying small ones and on fighting with them.

My mother has helped me most in my political life. Her great affection towards me even produced a change in her

late in life. Even while I was in school, she used to shield me against being thrashed by my father. I once squandered money given to me by father for paying my examination fees. The fees could not be paid. I ran home and told my mother. She scolded me at first, but then gave the money after pawning her ornaments. She did not say anything to my father.

There was a tour programme at the time of the Guruvayoor temple entry campaign. It passed through the village where I was staying. I wanted the members to be given meals at my home. But this could not be done as my father and brother-in-law were opposed to it. I went with the volunteers to see mother. She received them all. Calling me she said with tears in her eyes, *It not my fault that they could not be given food. I am innocent.* Although mother did not like my going to jail, she understood that it was a part of my political life. She would say: *Six months' jail is enough. I will be satisfied if he then comes to see me and spends two days with me and then goes back to jail.*

Mother used to read the newspaper daily for information about me. She thus came to have some familiarity with political matters. Her deepest political tenet, however, was her affection for me.

Mother died at the age of 68. She belonged to a sect that automatically practised untouchability and other social vices. Gradually a great change came over her. She stopped objecting to the neighbour's Thiyya daughter entering the house. I had feared how she would welcome Suseela, my wife, when she actually arrived at the house. But her behaviour was amazing even to me. She wished very much to see my child,

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but died without realising her wish.

Mother died during the 1954 election in Travancore-Cochin. I was then campaigning at a place far away from Vaikom. At 2am someone came to tell me that a telephone message had arrived with the news of her death. It was quite some time before I could reach home after getting the information.

A significant incident occurred a day before her death. She called my brother and said: Gopalan is busy with the elections. Do not bother him. Don't inform him about my illness. Let him do election work. I heard of this when I reached home after her death. I felt proud of my mother's political consciousness. But I was sad that I could not fulfil my duty to her. What difficulties does a political figure not have to overcome! My mother was the greatest solace in my political life. If only she were alive today!

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Even before the completion of my education, I had occasion to stay in several places in the interior of Tellicherry. It was customary in all those places for me to set up *literary societies* consisting of students and young people, to bring prominent speakers to address them and to hold annual meetings on a grand scale. I was also able to start manuscript magazines among students. Absorbed as I was in these activities, I yearned more and more to stop going to school and to start public work. Against my father's wishes, I stopped going to school. But under pressure from him I was obliged to take to the teaching profession.

I still remember an incident in my student days. Yakub Hassan, Gopala Menon, Madhavan Nair and other Congress leaders visited Tellicherry after coming out of jail. The people gave them a grand reception. Some of my classmates and I got together and left the mission school with our *cadjan*-made umbrellas even as classes were going on, drew the vehicles in which the leaders were travelling and took part in the meeting at the beach. Some including myself were taken to task by our teachers. This incident played a part in giving my life a

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new bent.

I taught for about seven years. The work was pleasing and exhilarating. Little innocent children, knowledge that I was the guardian of them all, many holidays, opportunity for public activities, a chance to earn the love and regard of the people, a situation in which I could forget the heavy cares of life and play and live with children—these exhilarated me. A teacher gets plenty of opportunity to meet the people and to know what they want. A good teacher could become the leader of the people of his village.

I worked for about two years as teacher at the Board School at Paralasserry. The headmaster of this school was my elder brother, A. K. Sankaran Nambiar. He spent his whole salary in helping the community. I learned from him how a teacher who loves his country can become the leader of the people. The middle class people of Paralasserry, Makheri and other places were brought together in a new organisation called *Yellow Shirt*. Its programme was to repair roads, clean tanks and start farming in one's own yard. My brother provided leadership to this organisation and spent a lot of money on it. He wrote some plays like *Chinnu's Luck* that underscored social injustices and got them staged. I can never forget that it was my brother who taught me the ABC of public service. When the Congress agitation began, he was found burdened with family care, despondent and unwilling to face up to adverse circumstances. I pondered sadly over how it would end. I was myself unable to change his attitude, so the efforts made to this end proved of no avail. It was from him that I had imbibed an aptitude and initiative for public work.

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For a long time now he had been a wearer of *khadi*. He had taken part in the Home Rule movement. It was exciting for me to see him arriving in school with a worn out *khaddar* shirt and a *cadjan* umbrella. Some of us young people were thrilled when in 1931 he refused to turn over the keys of the school to the Tellicherry Division Officer for anti-Congress propaganda. He was then sternly anti-British. But he became anti-Communist and a reactionary out of an inability to rise up to circumstances, to understand how the world was changing and to align himself against vested interests. He was able initially to turn young people like me, who resorted to Gandhi-ism, into revolutionaries and patriots. Later on he was to turn into reactionaries young people who were rushing forward with the times and under the shade of favourable circumstances.

My interest in teaching work was increasing. From being a teacher working for money, I became a teacher working as a friend of the people. From day-break until 9 o'clock I would visit students in their homes and talk to their guardians but would be at the school in time for class. After a hurried lunch I would coach backward pupils. Evenings I set apart for games with students and holidays for public work. A sudden change in my mood once a month and it meant a day of caning. I used to cane students mercilessly. A look at my face on that day and the children would tell each other, *Be ready. This is Gopalan Master's spanking day*. But I was particularly careful to play with the children on just these days. I would play against the team of the child who had been most thrashed. The poor boy would sometimes strike the ball against my leg

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and thus console himself. Except for these 'black' days I was their friend and aide. I was very careful to make a name as a good teacher. I worked for that day and night. I am proud that it was fruitful. Witness the felicitations and gold chains and rings that I got upon leaving each school.

A teacher's life is wholly a kind of public service. Just as a reactionary teacher can turn his pupils into puppets of the present ruinous educational system, a revolutionary teacher can instil patriotism, a sense of freedom and the courage and stamina to fight against oppression and social vices in the minds of boys who are to become citizens of the future. A teacher can of course turn his wards into bureaucrats by insisting on blind loyalty to superiors. He can also make them soldiers of war in the battle to salvage the country from the present educational, economic and political morass. The greatest service that I rendered as a teacher was to instil political consciousness in my students. I was particularly loyal to the boys who wore *khaddar* and the Gandhi cap. I was generous in giving marks to those who sang the national song and read newspapers. Taking the cue, lazy students skipped their class lessons and wore *khaddar* to please me and learned a set of national songs by rote. Indeed, many students in later life were to take to public activities.

But a teacher in those days had no sanction to do any of these things. A heart benumbed by hunger, a soul impregnated with despair and an abject helplessness that made one distrust even one's capacity to make a living—this is what obtained in those days. The people used to say that teaching was the last resort of the unemployed. I was sometimes ashamed

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to admit that I was a teacher. But the teachers of Kerala have rewritten their history. They have shown themselves to the world as models of self-respect, nationalism, courage and public service. They have shown that, although starving and reduced to skeletons, they are ready to undergo sacrifices in the struggle against slavery in whatever form it might appear. I am only too proud today to declare that I was once a teacher. Through his long struggles and agitations, the teacher of today has acquired for himself self-respect, self-confidence and vitality.

People are contemptuous of the half-starving teacher. They tend to regard their dress, meekness, subservience and patience even in the face of scorn, as signs of weakness. I felt that this should change. To go to school in trousers and with shoes, to change clothes twice daily, to go in for new fashions in dress—all this appeared to be a joke to some of the teachers themselves. It was customary for me to argue with those who were scornful of teachers. When the need arose, I was even prepared to come to blows to protect the honour of teachers.

Board authorities sent an order asking the people to construct a building for a school at Paralasserry. I had a considerable role to play in helping A. K. Sankaran Nambiar who made the greatest sacrifices to build premises costing Rs. 5,000 to house it. Staging dramas, holding games on Saturdays and Sundays at various places, carrying timber and stone necessary for the school—I did all these. This enthused students as well as the people at large. A teacher inside the school and an ordinary citizen outside. Children of big landlords did not like this. Their neatly pressed shirts often got soiled. What I

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did, offended their self-respect. But the people developed a genuine regard for me.

Besides this, I was keenly interested in games like football and badminton. I have won medals as a good player myself. I organised the Potheri Kunjambu Memorial Tournament while working in a Chovva School near Cannanore. I was able to meet the residents of the locality and to earn their trust. This was to greatly help in my future public work.

I was not a sportsman in the conventional sense of the term. I enjoyed not only playing with a rival team but fighting with its members after the game was over. The basis of this was that the opponent should be defeated in some way or other, so if we lost we fought. Games in which there was no fighting appeared to me to be colourless and devoid of excitement.

I was attracted by the Vaikom *Satyagraha* of 1924. I wanted to leave my work as teacher to become a *Satyagraha* volunteer. I sent a secret letter which was accepted by the committee. But because of the objections of my relatives and friends I could not go to join the *Satyagraha*.

I had much to do with a fraternal organisation under the leadership of Puthampurayil Ambootty. I tried to widen its scope and to have in it people of all creeds and communities. It was a time of feuds between Nayars and Thiyyas. The organisation was able to play an important part in creating communal harmony. A litter for the use of the sick and petromaxes for emergencies— all these they were able to arrange. Besides, it used to lend money to members and to in mediate in disputes between members of the public.

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I worked for one year as teacher of the Madrassathil Mo-hammadiya School at Calicut. It was at this time that I came into contact with the Muslim community and Muslim families. The majority of students of higher classes in those times were children of capitalists and the rich. Guardians sent them to school only because they wanted to be rid of the trouble of keeping them at home. The boys were not coming to school to learn nor were they sent for that purpose. Frustrated, I used to thrash them mercilessly in the beginning. But this was stopped by the Manager. He reminded me that it was no use trying to force students to learn. I changed my policy. I started playing with the children, visiting their homes for feasts and celebrations there and learning about the customs in their community. I became their trusted friend. Competitions were organised and plays staged. After winning their regard and trust, I found my attempts to teach them correspondingly more successful. *Nambiar Master* became their unforgettable teacher. I learnt from experience that it is not with the cane, but with the heart, that students should be struck.

One of those I met at that time was Krishna Panikkar. He was later to become my colleague in the Congress and Congress Socialist Party. He was then a pupil-teacher. We both lived at that time in Sankara Warriar's hotel, immortalised in the memory of the people of Calicut. It was a hotel in which grain was bought with money advanced by customers who came to eat a rice meal. Our own plight and that of the hotel can be imagined from this alone.

Before long, Krishna Panikkar began taking part in social

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work and the national freedom movement. He traversed the long coastal strip of Ponnani sub-district from one end to the other, spreading the message of the Congress, while he himself starved. He built up the Congress organisation and improvised reading rooms. It was this ceaseless work that brought on ill-health and caused his untimely death. Public workers of Kerala will never forget him.

The Congress in 1920 adopted a programme that was capable of mobilising the Indian masses. The Khilafat Movement of 1921 created a phenomenal stir throughout India. The Moplah rebellion excited my imagination. Although bereft of intelligent political leadership, well-conceived policy or programme, the brave deeds of my Muslim brothers who fought against imperialist oppression enthused me.

It was a time when youth associations campaigned for freedom in all parts of the country. In the interior, I took part in prohibition work, in the *Swadeshi* campaign and in stocking *Swadeshi* goods. I also propagated the *charkha* in villages. All this while I was off duty. I encountered some difficulties with school managers and authorities. A teacher who could not live as a slave of the manager had to shoulder a lot of difficulties. I did not like, and actually hated, to rise upon seeing the manager, to show him undue respect and to cringe before him. I fell out with the Inspector as I did not bribe him to pass me in the *practical*. Every six months or so I used to fall out with the manager.

While in Board Schools I was also the object of enmity of Board Presidents. Because of the dislike of the late Kerala Varma Raja, who was President of the Board of the Chirakkal

sub-district, I was for long refused employment under the Board.

I felt that it would be very difficult in future to live as a teacher and at the same time work in accordance with my ideals and wishes. Evidence of this gradually manifested itself. There is a limit to the freedom of activity of a teacher. I felt that I was going beyond those limits.

The last stage of my life as a teacher was at once extremely difficult and very interesting. While doing public work, I also started a day and night school. The Kadachira Gurukulam provided the higher elementary training course and certificate to teachers who already had lower elementary training. Pupils of this institution were teachers aged 45 and 50. Most of them were well versed in Malayalam and Sanskrit. Although it was very difficult to teach them English and other subjects, I felt proud of being a 'big' teacher teaching elementary school teachers in a big institution. School hours were from 7:30–11pm I taught my pupils with great enthusiasm as I wanted to exchange experiences with them. I was able to contribute in some measure to their way of life, thinking and opinions. Most of them are today nationalists and active in teachers' movements.

My father and other relatives were very suspicious of my activities. I used to reach home by eleven or twelve o'clock at night. I was not interested at all in domestic affairs. I was out for practically the whole of Saturday and Sunday. Father was worried about where my aptitude and conduct would land me. He instructed mother not to give me food if I came home very late. Fortunately I was able to escape this punishment

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with mother's help. Although she too did not like my activities, she was against starving me. I was sometimes thrashed by father.

Besides, I was fond of attending marriages of Thiyyas (Ezhavas). I publicly ate there, although in fear. Father would come to know of this. I was badly thrashed by my father and uncle. Uncle's beating was of a new type. He would first beat me with a stick, then throw it away and beat me with his hand and then again with the stick. But once the beating was over, he would be kind to me. This beating toughened me, and thus in a sense helped to withstand the rigours of my way of life.

Father regarded me as little better than a vagabond who did not pay attention to domestic matters. I had no desire to earn money. I spent money in paying the fees of students, in buying books for them, in helping the poor to marry off their children, in having tea with friends, in buying a cycle and luxuries. I was in heavy debt. Father understood which way I was going and he was sad. My parents realised that it was they who had created the circumstances for this, in providing my political orientation. However, they could not have realised that I would take to such a dangerous path. They tried in many ways to change me and my ways. I was once even sent out of the house.

I was tired out by incessant work. I only got two or three hours of sleep a day. Having to supervise domestic work also worried me. The workers would be waiting—the carpenter on one side and farm-worker on the other. I had to find money to pay all of them. The gratitude and good words of the people of my household who lived as my dependents

and the congratulations of my relatives actually pained me as they stemmed from mere self-interest. Later on, after 1930, it was these same people who spread rumours against me and tried to bring me down and destroy me. I was harried by the thought that I should deliver myself from family burdens and narrow family service. My ideas and feelings took shape accordingly.

Eventually the entire responsibility for family affairs devolved on me. This caused a change in my life. I took equal interest in domestic as well as public affairs. I built a new house and organised a night school. I became the object of respect and praise from the family and from the people at large. My income increased and people thought father's plan had worked. But at this very time, unknown to others, a conflict was going on in my mind. My field of activity and interests became wider. From Paralasserry my eyes went as far as Bombay and Calcutta and Sabarmati Ashram. I ventured to think of the welfare of not one village but of 7 lakh villages in India. I pondered over whether I should aim at the welfare of a small family or that of the 45 crore people of India. I started hating my life as a teacher with Congress work on Sundays. I tried more than ever before to understand what was happening around me. I read political literature. Sick with the burden of family life, I cast my eyes over the whole of India. I saw the people of India arrayed against British rule and its cruelties. I found brave people, young and old, rushing forward to erase slavery, the burden of India's shame. Peasants who were seething with discontent as a result of the post-war miseries, demobilised soldiers who were harassed by unem-

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ployment, young people enthused by the Russian revolution and the other changes in Europe, middle class nationalists who were resentful of the oppressive rule, the Indian capitalist class which hated the British capitalist class— this was the situation as I saw it.

Accordingly, I took interest from 1928 in *khadi* propagation and boycott of foreign clothes. I used to visit villages on holidays for propagation of *khadi* and *Swadeshi* goods. I worked along with Sreedharan, a clerk in Potheri Kunji Raman's factory in Cannanore. Association with him made me all the more earnest. I propagated *charkha* in middle class families, spun yarn from khaddur and sent it to headquarters. A. K. Sankaran Nambiar was immersed in *khadi* work. *Khadi* spinning was arranged in Paralasserry and *khadi* yarn was introduced in some houses. I took part in this also. It was clear to me that freedom was impossible without a struggle and I should keep myself ready for the struggle whenever it came. I knew, however, that this was no easy task. I felt that it would not be possible without rebelling against the circumstances in which I lived.

I saw the depth to which India had fallen in 150 years of British rule. The British government in India was the most expensive in the whole world. The average daily income of an Indian was two annas. The daily income of the Viceroy alone was Rs. 700. There was, besides, an amazing amount of expense on the armed forces. While a German soldier received an annual salary of Rs. 145 and a French soldier Rs. 185, an English soldier was paid Rs. 285 in England and Rs. 775 in India. 92 per cent of the people here were still illiterate.

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Industrial growth in India was stunted because of the ruinous tariff policy of the Government. India was only an estate for growing raw materials for her imperial masters. Public health too was most unsatisfactory. The offspring of insanitation like cholera and plague as a rule never leave India, and thrive in neglect.

Everything except fresh air was taxed. Even water and fire were taxed. I felt that every Indian who was proud of his country and who had a sense of shame left should be ready to totally destroy a system that plundered an entire country and suppressed a vast populace with the aid of a band of arrogant officials. With a heart saturated with anti-British sentiments, I was waiting for the bugle call to join the independence struggle.

I was in the midst of a mighty revolutionary wind blowing throughout India. Youth leagues, workers' unions, revolutionary organisations, the activities of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, strikes—all these evoked sympathetic reverberations in my heart. There was a strong urge in me to break away from the placid existence of a teacher with only occasional public activities in off-duty hours, to dedicate all my time to the service of the country. An intense struggle began between my personal life and the tumultuous events around me. Such were the unsettling conflicts that disturbed me prior to 1930.

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The Congress adopted its famous Independence resolution in 1929. This gave a great fillip to nationalist activities.

The following year, 1930, opened a new chapter in Indian politics. It was also the year when the first chapter in my life's transitional period was written. A time when the Congress— which was built by the Indian capitalist class to protect their interests and to counter British imperialism which was against those interests—had left the old path of petitions and applications and was on the threshold of a mass struggle following more revolutionary methods. A time when the middle class of India were attracted to socialism as a result of the world economic crisis and the Soviet economic system that steered clear of that crisis and brought about the economic development of a vast continent.

There was a profound dissimilarity between other mass movements and the 1930 movement. It was the 1930 movement that brought the largest number of people into the political field and this was a result of a common programme and of common activities throughout the length and breadth of the land. Besides the middle class, workers and peasants

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also participated in this movement at least on a small scale. It was also a movement that shocked and terrified the ruling authorities to a degree never before achieved.

On March 12, Mahatma Gandhi began the historic Dandi march with his followers. Following this, in Kerala, a *jatha* under K. Kelappan started out from Calicut to Payyannoor. It succeeded in stirring the whole of Kerala. There was a mass ovation for it at a place called Chovva. This was arranged under my leadership. We were out on the road quite early in our hurry to see this *jatha*, which had sworn to cut at the root of imperialism, and its leader Kelappan. Somebody was walking in front drenched in sweat in the scorching sun. A short man had turned grey. Behind him were some followers brimming with patriotism. A very dark complexioned youth was singing excitedly and the others were singing in chorus. A *jatha* that would thrill anyone. Unknown to myself, it stirred me, and a flash passed through my heart. I went to the town along with the *jatha*. Kelappan spoke in the evening at the public meeting. I listened intently to his speech which stirred the thousands gathered there and threw thousands like me into the vortex of the Independence movement. He related how a group of merchants who came to sell cups and toys turned into an imperialist force ruling 45 crores of people and how 150 years of their rule had ruined the country's economy. I felt that slavery was a burden of shame that should be smashed. I decided then and there to join those *Satyagrahis*. But the leader told me that none would be taken into the group at the moment and that those who were ready to break the law should join them at Payyannoor.

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I could not sleep that night, for a conflict between two streams of thought fought itself through in my mind. My conscience asked me to forsake everything and join the struggle. This meant bidding farewell to my people and incurring the strong displeasure of my dear father and members of my family. My mother and family would suffer and be deprived of luxuries and comforts. Possibly they would have to live in dependence on others and bear their ill-treatment. I might lose my job and suffer a variety of hardships. On the other hand, I would have the satisfaction that I had fought for the freedom of the people who shuddered under the weight of oppression and who indulged in self-annihilation, loot, robbery and murder out of an inability to sustain themselves. I would be a proud son of Mother India who had taken up cudgels to fight for her freedom. Such was the gist of my thoughts.

I won this test. I decided to resign my job and devote myself to the civil disobedience campaign. I handed over my letter of resignation to the school headmaster, my uncle, A. K. Govindan Nambiar. Of all my relatives, he was the one for whom I had the greatest regard. He preached only that which he could practise. He acted in accordance with his precepts. He never acted impulsively, and often helped me in my political life, though there were differences of opinion. I knew, however, that he had faith in my sincerity. He was both sad and happy that I was leaving my job and joining the struggle, sad because of the plight of the family and happy at the courage and spirit of independence that I showed in joining the struggle in the face of severe odds. He asked me indirectly through intermediaries whether I could not afford

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to wait a few days more. I did not agree and he immediately released me with his blessings.

I bade farewell to everything that I had held till then. I said goodbye to the members of my family, father, other relatives and my job. My family had a particular individuality in that it was full of 'royalists' ranging from Sub-Judge to *adhikari* (village headman) and from Sub-Inspector to ordinary soldier. My mother's brother was then a Sub-Collector. The family properties had held the titles of *Full honoured* and *Half-honoured* since the time of the East India Company. To members of my family, my proposed action was nothing less than treason. They were worried over how my action would affect the family as a whole. But there was another side to it. On the opposite side were young people who had come to the fore as a result of the waves of unrest surging around them. Courting arrest along with me were half a dozen relatives, including A. K. Padmanabhan Nambiar and A. K. Kunhi Kannan Nambiar. They have all retired from political life today. Working along with me from that day to the present time was my relative Comrade K. Damu. Along with other comrades, it is he who is responsible for the present awakening in the village where I was born. I am thrilled that because of these efforts a boat workers' union, a weaving society, a *beedi* workers' union and a peasants' union have sprung up there. I will never forget the efforts of the comrades who are responsible for this. Father was a nationalist. He respected Gandhi and Nehru. But there was a limit to his nationalism. He did not like me leaving my job and going to jail. Therefore, I had to completely cut off all relations with father. So for five years

he did not speak to me; he regarded me as an enemy. This was extremely painful. Nevertheless, I suffered that also for our country.

Mother feared for my life. More than the family's condition, this was what worried her. She thought all this was my fate. She started making offerings in temples. She had astrologers tell her when my bad ways would end and when good days would once more be mine.

But her love for me was intense. During summer, she would collect mangoes and other fruits and keep them for me. At first she did not like my going to jail. But her only requirement today is that I should stay at home once in six months. The march of time changed her too.

I decided to go for *Satyagraha* on the day after I had submitted my resignation. I went secretly to Calicut from Cannanore and offered *Satyagraha*. I was arrested and jailed the same day. I thus won through the first ordeal in my life. But I could not sleep for a month. I brooded over home, mother and the repercussions of my arrest on father.

Most of the people of the place were happy over my doings. My little sacrifice delighted them. Some who were spies of the police said it was sheer madness to leave one's job and go to jail.

For two months prior to civil disobedience and jail, finding volunteers for picketing was my responsibility. It was interesting work. There were countless young men ready to join the movement. Though they had not had much political education, they knew that British rule was oppressive. Therefore, why stay aloof if freedom could be had by going to jail as

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Gandhi wanted? Moreover, they were aware that going to jail was a lofty action. But they did not know how they could face their families and convince them of the correctness of their action. These youngsters would come to my house at night and sleep there. They would be sent to Cannanore by the first bus the following morning for the first train to Calicut. From there they would be sent to Calicut. Upon arrival there they would be sent for picketing. They were arrested the same day. Their families would only know the next day. The next day, they would start for Calicut. By this time, their son or nephew or whoever it was, would be in the lock-up, and they had to return empty-handed. Parents thus became my severe critics.

The day came when a Namboodiri of my neighbourhood— hardly 18 years old—asked me to send him for picketing. As I knew his people's attitude, I asked him to wait. But he insisted and stayed overnight in my house. As usual, he was sent the next morning. There was an uproar the next day as the senior Namboodiri started scolding and berating me. He left for Calicut by the next train. But by that time the youngster was in the lock-up— my mother was afraid that the Namboodiri's curse would run its reputed course. More than the British Government, she feared the Namboodiri's curse! Characteristically, she offered prayers for the curse to be ineffective. It was therefore very difficult for youngsters who were not independent to take part in this movement. Still, I was able to send two dozen people for civil disobedience from my little village and neighbourhood. The inhabitants regarded men like me as a bad influence and enticers of innocent boys.

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I did not in any way alter my decision about my future. Many of my students followed me. A great many of them were sent by me for civil disobedience. Finally, I myself courted arrest on the beach along with Potheri Madhavan, who was the then leader of the Congress. The police challenged my patriotism with their *lathis* and guns and torture vans. It was a joke to me.

Jails, surrounded as they were by formidable looking walls, frightened me before I actually entered one. I was first in Cannanore Jail and then in Vellore Jail. First a B class prisoner and then an A class one. Government took me to be a good boy. Divide and rule—that was the policy of the ruling authorities even in jail. Those who conducted the struggle jointly were divided into two. It was a comfortable life for one section and misery for the other. This division did cause a split among the prisoners. I was an A class prisoner but I did not find this categorisation desirable. Somehow, I felt that there was something wrong with it. On this occasion I did not have to suffer any of the hardships of jail life. It, in fact, gave me the opportunity of meeting the leaders of Kerala and the leaders of Andhra and Tamil Nadu. To me jail life was like hostel life. One could study there. There were 400 people where I was incarcerated.

Who were these A and B class prisoners? Lawyers, doctors, landlords, capitalists, educated unemployed; some had resigned their jobs to come there. In the morning, flag hoisting and in the evening, prayers and in between, occasional speeches of the leaders.

It is doubtful if there were many ready to suffer extreme

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hardship. I became sceptical of the ability of this class to lead a struggle at its critical moments, when the enemy's onslaught became fierce.

Of all the leaders in the jail, the one for whom I felt the greatest respect was Kelappan. I used to show him the letters that I received from my village.

Something happened at that time in the village. Excited students staged a hartal as soon as they heard of my arrest. They did not pay heed to the pleas of their teachers. An orthodox-minded teacher reported the matter to the guardian of a boy named Kumaran. The angry parent thrashed the boy very badly. Out of despair, the boy committed suicide that very night. Kelappan was informed of this. It pained him. After leaving jail, he wrote an article about it.

It was usual for Kelappan to discuss future activities with me. He wanted to fight against untouchability and other evils. He was confident that he could count on my assistance in such an endeavour.

We knew from newspapers of what was happening outside. We were excited by the news that thousands of people were ready to break the law daily. We were prepared to welcome new faces.

People like T. V. Chathukutty Nair lightened the period of jail life. T. V. Chathukutty Nair was my greatest well-wisher. He had been engaged in working for the Congress since 1921. In five minutes he could magnetize anyone. A fine conversationalist and a very able man, he endeared himself to all prisoners.

A subject of discussion among prisoners was the Sapru-

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Jayakar negotiations and the Gandhi-Irwin pact. All of them wanted to come out of jail, yet there were also many who did not like a pact that made concessions to the other side.

They feared that such a pact would hold back the flow of people surging forward to join the struggle in their anxiety for freedom. They felt that to discourage people in this manner would be falling a prey to the already hard-pressed officials. They believed that a concessional treaty would sap the strength of the agitation. However, all nursed the hope that they could come out in triumphant colours as political sufferers. Everyone began to think about future action.

The Gandhi-Irwin pact led to a new awakening in the country. Youngsters who were disappointed not to be able to court imprisonment, came in their thousands for picketing. The educated felt that they should do something for the country's freedom. Imprisonment was a testimonial of love of one's country. The ordinary people found something lacking in those who did not go to jail, however much they might have worked otherwise. There were even stories of the police being requested to make arrests during the 1932 civil disobedience campaign. The public gave a hero's welcome to those released from jail. They were lionised by all.

Congress work was an uphill task at this time. There were no Congress committees in existence, nor funds. The work had to be carried out on the basis of personal approaches to friends and acquaintances. As there was no money even to pay for one's bus fare, one had to cover long distances on foot. It was customary to walk 25-30 miles daily. I still vividly remember a stray example of this life. I left the Tel-

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licherry volunteer camp one morning for a flag-hoisting ceremony at Koothuparambu. The camp manager at the time was Ananda Thirthan. I had with me one anna. The distance from Tellicherry to Koothuparambu was eight miles. There was a coffee shop owned by an old woman midway between Koothuparambu and Kathiroom. I spent two pies on coffee and four pies on *Pittu* at that shop. Reaching Koothuparambu at 9am, I hoisted the flag and made a speech.

From Koothuparambu I left for Mattannoor about ten miles away. At 12:30pm I reached Mattannoor. I picketed for about two hours. The tavern-keepers there were opposed to picketing. The local people too did not help. I started from there at 4 o'clock after collecting some rice for the volunteers. In the meantime, with the money that I still had I had tea for a quarter anna and sweet tapioca for an equal amount. I went to speak at a public meeting at a place ten miles away from Koodali near Mattannoor. It was 6:30pm when I reached there, and the people had already started murmuring over my delay. I was so tired that I found it difficult to speak. I spoke for two hours with the greatest difficulty. Afterwards, I went to the house of a friend nearby. I collapsed in the verandah of the house. He wanted me to have a wash and food. I was so fatigued that I could not get up. When he still pleaded, I felt greatly irritated with him. I told him not to trouble me. I lay down there and slept until 6 o'clock. There were many such days of overcrowded schedules and no amenities to speak of.

While on this subject, I cannot help recalling the late Dr. T. K. Nair, P. C. Mammen Nambiar and others. It is impossible to omit them in any enumeration of people who have helped

the Congress or given it encouragement. T. K. Nair was my classmate and a particular friend of mine. My association helped him a great deal in coming to the fore in the Congress.

There were many places without travel facilities in the interior of Chirakkal and Kottayam sub-districts. One had to travel many miles through woods and forests to reach such stations. It was hard for Congressmen who travel only by car to go to such places. Only those who could walk long distances succeeded. It was a question of 15 or 20 miles walk from Payyannoor to Padiyottuchal, Kakkara, Nathamangalam and other places. For people like Comrade Subramanya Shenoy such journeys were quite easy. It was by climbing hills and through valleys like this, by trekking through forests infested with tigers and bison and by drinking *coffee water* that people like me hoisted the Congress flag in the interior in those times. *Khaddar* clothes at that time were an object of ridicule. Some coconut merchants who sincerely believed that we were responsible for the fall in the price of coconuts hired hoodlums to beat us. Hooting was common. Tavern-keepers and their associates, drunkards and a section of Muslims abused us and beat us. It was by thus suffering the scorn and attacks of villagers, by trekking on until completely tired out by hunger and by facing all conceivable kinds of vicissitudes that the Congress was brought closer to the masses. By 1936–37 the situation changed. Buses started giving us free rides. The people started feeding and helping us. They came to know what the Congress stood for.

There are many chapters like the one delineated above in the history of my early activities. For want of a change of

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clothes to wear, I wore the same clothes for 10 or 15 days at a time. Ignorant of our hardship, the fashionable rich used to say: *These fellows are dirty. You can smell the stench when they come close.* This was indeed true. But it was not our fault. It was the stench of the sorry state of our country. Until the Congress became a people's organisation and until we were accepted by the general public as friends, such hardships were unavoidable. Any social worker will have to suffer privation until he wins the people's confidence as the fruit of one or two years of service. Only a strong organisation can mitigate this hardship.

Picketing taverns and shops selling imported cloth, was our major occupation at that time. From Chirakkal sub-district my field of activity was widened to the whole of north Malabar. Speaking at public meetings, organising picketing, concentrating activity at places where there was opposition, individual picketing was my responsibility. I was invited to meetings even at villages where meetings had never been held before. Circumstances made me a public speaker. I realised that only a good speaker can mobilise the masses, so I trained myself in the art of public speaking.

Picketing by itself was not enough to attract all kinds of people and to bring them closer to the Congress. It did not have any impact at all on the poor peasants and workers. The picketing volunteers were of the middle class and members of landed families. They were unable to change the way they themselves treated peasants. The schism between caste and outcaste thrived as ever before. One section of the public that strove for independence was unable to approach, let alone

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impress, another section striving for the same goal along with them. Something happened one day while we were picketing a tavern. When a poor peasant was entering the tavern, its proprietor, who was a picketer, requested him humbly not to drink. The peasant was annoyed and treated the proprietor to a sermon. Many people gathered around.

You say you are working for the poor. Is this not a lie? It is only to cheat poor people like us. You have enough to eat. You don't have to work. We work so that you can live in comfort. Only yesterday you were paid rent. Because of the floods this season not a grain of paddy was harvested. Still you did not allow us: any exemption. We starve although we work hard. We are even compelled to borrow. Next year I may have to leave my hut. Creditors will drive me out. You don't even give one water to quench one's thirst. And here you have asked us not to drink. The whites should be driven out, you say. How good they are! Do they have untouchability? They can be touched, one can go near them—it is not possible to approach your house. Yet you ask us to help you to free this country. What will that avail us? We will not listen to you.

The majority of peasants had roughly the same kind of attitude.

I am not an intellectual. Intellectuals do not particularly like my speeches. They say they are devoid of politics. This is true in a way. I have not learnt the *theories* they have learnt from books and the theories they cherish. Even if I learn them, I do not vomit them undigested. But the people like my speeches. With great care I have studied the life of the people, their ways of dress, their habitations and their surroundings. I describe their travails in a language they can understand.

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Everywhere I spoke, I would investigate and understand the life of the people who lived and worked there. I would encourage those who helped the movement. To illustrate my talks I would find short anecdotes. and simple facts appropriate for each particular occasion.

About the misdeeds of imperialism, for example, I only spoke in a language easily understood by the masses. I was particularly careful to turn the people into enemies of foreign rule. I would cite certain statistics for this. Monthly salary of the Governor of Madras: 10,000 rupees, Yearly allowance: 37,000 rupees, For furniture repair/year: 24,000 rupees, To buy new furniture: 20,000 rupees, For bodyguards: 40,000 rupees, For a secretary: 100,000 rupees, To buy new cars: 93,000 rupees, For a military band: 47,000 rupees, For new clothes: £2,000. Peasant's income in the Madras. province, Rs. 11–12 as. Viceroy's daily income 780 rupees. Average yearly income of an Indian, 70 rupees. Such figures are revealing. The public never forgets them. They create in them much enthusiasm, enlightenment and an anti-imperialist mentality. They will memorise the figures and pass them on to others after the meeting. What more graphic illustration can there be of the injustice of the British rule?

While on the subject of speeches, I remember one incident. I once spoke along with another comrade at a meeting attended by cotton mill workers. After the speech, I was walking behind some workers who were discussing the comparative merits of the two speeches. *All others speak only about China and Spain. Only Gopalettan speaks about our maistry and timekeeper. Even our jokes the Comrade hears and includes in*

his speeches. This was how they talked. The urgent needs of the people, their main problems, their solution—it is these that public speakers must deal with. To stir them up, one must oppose as the occasion arises the misdeeds of bureaucrats and exploiters. A small incident can be blown up to produce a big reaction. One must be able to exploit such incidents. A peasant named Pidarani Chandu was evicted by Manipuzha Namboodiri and tortured by the police. The agitation springing from this development was one of the incidents that helped found the peasant movement in Chirakkal sub-district. It was thus that I became a speaker. The people made me a speaker. My weapons were their problems, misery and daily struggles.

Picketing camps and volunteer groups were organised throughout the land. The leadership of these was in the hands of the middle class and educated youth. There was amongst the poor a sort of hostility towards this programme.

The Wayanad sub-district was until 1930 a region where Congress light had not penetrated at all. Wayanad is a fortress of the notorious malaria. Congress workers were as a rule unwilling to go to Wayanad. Erring officials were transferred to Wayanad as a punishment—so depressing a place it was.

In 1931, for about six months after the pact I worked in Wayanad. Krishna Gounden was a very rich man of Wayanad and a dedicated nationalist and sympathiser of the Congress. We got a good deal of help from him. Dharmaraja Iyer and others also helped. Krishna Bhat worked in Wayanad continuously for about a year. We were also able to field K. Narayanan Nair, the scion of a large landed family of Wayanad. The

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workers set up camp at Tellicherry. Comrades Rama Warri-er, Krishna Warri-er and others who had been active from the 1930 struggle onwards also came forward. Gopalan Nair known as the local Gandhi and Kunji Raman also worked in Thalapuzha. Many joined the Congress in Mananthavadi, including merchants and members of the Muslim community.

We had picketed at Mananthavadi, Kalpatta, Vaithiri, Mep-padi and other nearby places. It created much enthusiasm among the people. Most toddy was sold on Sundays, as a large number of estate workers would be free to come on that day. They stopped coming after we started picketing. The tavern owners suffered great loss. They promised not to bid for liquor shops in future. Picketing was stopped.

At the same time, Congress meetings were held and new members were enlisted. As a result of this activity, there was great awakening and enthusiasm in Wayanad.

Before the Guruvayoor temple entry agitation, Kelap-pan visited Mananthavadi, Kalpatta and other places and addressed public meetings and received a purse of 300 rupees. The people of Wayanad admit that it was because of my in-tensive work that the tricolour began to flutter throughout the length and breadth of this sub-district and Congress com-mittees were formed. Wayanad had been sleeping prior to 1930.

The wind of change also blew among estate workers in Thalapuzha. As a result of their agitation, they were later able to secure some relief from their precarious living. Of all classes of workers it is the estate worker who suffers most. It is very difficult to approach and organise them. It can only

be done by workers who toil with them.

The Congress seed that I and my co-workers planted and fostered in Wayanad began to grow and flower later on. We proved this during the legislature election. The Government resented this. They feared that our activities in a region full of estate workers would adversely affect the white estate-owners. Police began intimidating our workers.

While speaking at the first political conference at Mananthavadi, I strongly criticised the then police chief there, *Morazha* (hero) Kuttikrishnan Menon, for his methods of torture. He arranged for rowdies to attack me at the end of the meeting. But the attack did not materialise, probably because of the fact that I had a greater following than he among the people of Wayanad and also perhaps because he realised the consequences of an attack on me.

K. Raman Menon and Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon had urged me to undertake the activities at Wayanad. Both Raman Menon and Kozhippuram encouraged and helped me a lot in the early stages. Madhava Menon's house became my own home. I was for long accepted as one of their family. I can never forget their mother who used to give me food with such affection whenever I went there famished with hunger. She treated me as a boy and her own son.

It was also true that Srimathi A. V. Kuttimalu Amma, whom Madhava Menon used to call by her pet name *Oppa* (sister), was also my *Oppa*. The way she worked thrilled me. Madhava Menon was very tactful. If there was a difference of opinion, he did not bring it into the open and disaffect others. He expressed it only through action. But as differences of

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opinion increased in course of time, we drew apart from each other until our meetings were reduced to a mere exchange of formalities. That we would go our separate ways so soon could not even be imagined at that time.

The volunteers picketing taverns had to suffer untold difficulties. While picketing the Dharmadam tavern, the shopkeeper emptied a vessel in which fish had been cleaned, on my head. Physical assaults took place in some places. While speaking along with the late L. S. Prabhu at Vadakkumpadu near Tellicherry a group of people arrived with a Union Jack, created an uproar, cried victory to the king and the queen and brought the meeting to a halt.

Wherever possible, it was usual for the police to incite the people to create trouble at our meetings. The government was scared of the picketing campaign that had spread everywhere, so they got officials and others to campaign against it.

At the end of a meeting, people would air their opinions freely. I used to pay heed to these. The common man felt that picketing was against his interests. *If we work from morning to evening, we get a small wage. Our landlords are expropriatory. We suffer only because of these landlords' boys who make speeches and picket and not because of the government. After a day's hard work, a little toddy is a relief. They don't allow us even that. The white man's fabrics are very cheap. They don't allow us to buy these. As we toil on the fields, we can't use their sack-like cloth. We don't get the time to spin on the **charkha**. They have lowered the price of coconuts too.* This was how the poor felt. Although a large section of the middle class came forward, it was not possible to mobilise the poverty-stricken masses.

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Volunteer classes were excellently organised: ordinary food, a definite programme of work for everyone, a flag hoisting ceremony in the morning. The march past and picketing of such volunteers excited the people. The people themselves provided food at the volunteer camps.

The part played by women in this movement should be specially remembered. People were thrilled by the speeches of Mrs. Samuel Aron, Mrs. Pavamani and Kamalavathi.

I was in North Malabar for about six months conducting picketing and volunteer camps and making speeches at public meetings. Especially at Mattannoor, Iritty and other places in the interior of Kottayam sub-district I gained access to new sections of the public and arranged for classes. There was a new spirit and awakening everywhere. A great many young men came forward.

Muslims approved of the picketing of toddy shops, but they did not like the Congress becoming strong. They thought that this would mean Hindu domination after the expulsion of the foreigners. They did not, for instance, allow a public meeting at Irikkoor. There was opposition in other Muslim centres too. They remembered the persecution and hardships of 1921. Their programme consisted of hooting and of denial of sites for public meetings. They spread the word that the Congress was a Hindu organisation that wanted to suppress Muslims. They particularly hated Muslim Congressmen. Ernanad sub-district in particular was conspicuous for the absence of meetings or picketing.

There was a phenomenal awakening of youth throughout the length and breadth of Kerala. Karumbranad sub-district

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was in a flux—thanks to E. C. Kunjikannan Nambiar's Yuvaka Sangham. The idea that something should be done for the country's freedom and that freedom could be achieved by the unity of the people spread through the land. Everywhere there was a questioning attitude towards meaningless customs and the old order. Gandhiji's leadership created in young people a new moral awakening and self-effacing spirit.

Chapter 4

The foundations of British imperialism were disunity, division, mutual distrust and feuds between the majority and minority communities. India could not become free until these foundations were destroyed. Muslims started wondering whether there was any difference between Hindu domination that divided and ruled India and British rule. The outcastes began claiming that the foreign government that guaranteed freedom of travel at least was preferable to a caste Hindu regime that did not allow them even to approach or touch them. The British regarded Indians as illiterate pagans who were incompetent to rule themselves. The caste Hindus who prided themselves on being a superior class among Indians drove out a section of the Hindus. They had no freedom of movement. No facilities for educating themselves. They could not come within sight of caste Hindus or drink the same water as they did. In such a situation, how could we become capable of resisting foreign rule? To accentuate this disunity and division, to stir up Muslims against Hindus, Hindus against Muslims and caste Hindus against outcastes—this was imperialism's strategy.

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Amery and company smiled sardonically at the plight of 45 crores of people. The meaning of that smile was this: Fools, you do not deserve freedom. You do not trust each other. The majority does not concede the demands of the minority. You do not realise that your unity is our death warrant. Divide and rule; that's our policy. The Congress has been unable even today to grant the just demands of minorities and to obtain their confidence and love.

Under these circumstances, the Congress decided to wage a struggle against untouchability and other similar social evils. Kelappan decided to table a resolution on temple entry *Satyagraha* at the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee meeting. The KPCC meeting at Guruvayoor adopted this resolution and authorised Kelappan to conduct the *Satyagraha*. Some Congressmen did not like this. They felt that it would divert the Congress from its primary programme of struggle against imperialism. They regarded the Harijan movement as little more than a communal movement. The thinking at that time was that communal organisations should be destroyed. It was believed that it was impossible to change communal organisations from their reactionary policies and make them progressive. It was also feared that the temple entry agitation would disaffect caste Hindus in the Congress and thus weaken the organisation as a whole. They did not consider the other side of the coin.

They did not appreciate the fact that the struggle against disunity and factionalism was a struggle against imperialism. Some of my own friends made fun of me, saying that I was becoming a reactionary myself after becoming Kelappan's

disciple. Far from deterring me, this crystallised my determination to follow my chosen path. I was happy that a struggle against die-hard conservatism was in the offing. As it was, I was elected captain of the *Satyagraha* volunteers.

Kelappan, Meyarath Sankaran and I toured Ponnani and other areas after the KPCC meetings. A new awakening could be noticed among the people. They were happy to discover that the injustice and oppression inflicted on a section of humanity from time immemorial could be ended by their own efforts. However, a small group still strongly opposed our movement.

Immediately afterwards Subramanyan Thirumumpu and I went to North Malabar for propaganda work. It was then that I met A. C. Kannan Nair, K. C. Kunhi Raman Nambiar and others. The *Satyagraha* movement received immense help from them. Although a staunch Gandhi-ite, A.C.K Nair was always willing to work with people of other opinions. K.C Kunhi Raman Nambiar suffered a great deal then because of his family and relatives. A public meeting was arranged at Payyannoor. There is a place called Kandoth near Payyannoor. There is a public road there. But Harijans were not allowed to walk on that road. The inhabitants of Kandoth were of the Thiyya community. Their temple was close to the road. It was because of fear of pollution of the temple that no one was allowed to walk that way.

Anyway, in order that nothing untoward should occur, it was decided to discuss the problem with some of the leaders of the locality. K. V. Kunhi Rama Puthuval was sent to Vengayil Appukuttan Nair. The elite of Kandoth were also

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invited. Nobody knows even today what transpired at these talks. Pothuval informed us that the procession could be held and that nothing untoward would happen. A small group of Harijans had come from Pazhayangadi under the leadership of Keraleeyan. Many joined and conducted the procession. Keraleeyan and I led the procession and many women also took part.

The people of Kandoth knew about the procession. They, therefore, made necessary arrangements beforehand. When the procession neared the road, a large mob of old and young people, men and women, rushed forward and started beating us. The women carried heavy wooden poles. Keraleeyan and I stood where we were and faced the barrage. Others ran away. We asked the women with us to run to safety. The attack lasted about half an hour. The *Kandoth short stick* was notorious. Many were injured. Keraleeyan and I fell down unconscious. We were taken to hospital in a car. There we lay unconscious for some hours. Even the death statement of Keraleeyan was taken. The next morning he was taken home.

This was the first physical attack I had faced in my political life. But there was the satisfaction that the *Kandoth assault* found a prominent place in news-coverage. It was the best propaganda for the Guruvayoor temple entry *Satyagraha*. The incident opened the eyes of the public. District Board authorities came to inspect the place. They put up a board that all had the right to use the road. The police charge-sheeted a number of people and registered cases against them. People began to think of the injustice of untouchability.

A committee was formed for conducting the Guruvay-

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oor *Satyagraha*. The committee was not from Malabar alone, but included some leaders from Cochin and Travancore too. The Nair Society President, Mannath Padmanabha Pillai, the SNDP Secretary Kunjikirishnan, Rukmini Amma, Kuttan Nair, Kurur Namboodiripad and others were on the committee. A camp was built near the Guruvayoor temple. It was difficult to acquire land for the camp. Here the efforts of the late Puthusery Kuttappu, who helped the *Satyagraha* right through, should be mentioned. Indeed the help he and his family gave should never be forgotten.



The Guruvayoor *Satyagraha* participants

The temple authorities also made arrangements. Barbed wire fencing was put up all around the temple. Able-bodied watchmen were engaged to keep an eye on the *Satyagrahis*.

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The threat was bandied around that the *Satyagrahis* would be beaten to death. The temple was owned by the Samoodiri Raja. The orthodox elements started adopting threatening postures. They cursed the sway of Kali Yuga. Harijans couldn't walk on the public road entering the temple, and certainly not in the precincts of Guruvayoorappan! Conservatives could think of no greater scandal. It became the subject of conversation everywhere. A few nationalists who were freedom-lovers and *khadi*-wearers came out in their true colours. Some were agitating for freedom from foreign rule of crores of oppressed people. Indeed, some caste Hindus who esteemed themselves to be Congressmen tore up their *khadi* dress and smashed Gandhiji's picture. They still wanted the freedom to oppress and suppress Harijans; that was claimed to be their birthright. But they were resentful of foreign rule. On one side, the agitation for freedom and on the other, suppression of the same agitation. A section of caste Hindus vowed that they would not remain in the Congress any longer if the Congress meant to interfere in religious matters. Some caste Hindus however, welcomed A. K. Gopalan and the *jatha* with the same hands with which they had stoned Kelappan and his *Satyagrahis* when they had gone to offer civil disobedience. They said that if the Congress strove for the freedom of the oppressed and suppressed poor, they were in sympathy with it. They gave them bananas and tender coconuts with the same hands with which they had earlier stoned the *Satyagrahis*. The poor people who had attacked volunteers during the tavern picketing donated money to the *Satyagraha* fund. Those who believed that the Congress stood for caste Hindu domination

carefully watched this change. Radical Namboodiri youths jumped with joy as they were waiting for an opportunity to destroy this social evil implanted by their forefathers. The Namboodiri womenfolk groaning under the purdah of their umbrellas began to heave a sigh of relief as they heard the sound of the blows dealt to orthodoxy. The rulers were afraid that Hindus might unite. They entered the scene with the help of Queen Victoria's proclamation. A stir everywhere! Sanathanists and reformers, men as well as women, were agitated alike. Palyath Achan and V. T. Bhattathiripad came to the scene arrayed on opposite sides.

The first of November. The whole of Kerala was waiting for that day. A group of volunteers under Subramanyan Thirumumpa had started from Cannanore on foot on October 21 for Guruvayoor. I was captain of this volunteer group. The happenings on the way to Guruvayoor, demonstrations, public meetings, receptions and the like, exhilarated us. The multitude of volunteers who joined us ranged from *untouchables, those whose very sight pollutes*, to Namboodiris. The Harijan youths in the *jatha* attracted the attention of all. They were proud that they were not *grass growing under paddy seedlings*. As representatives of a section that had been trampled underfoot for centuries, they were glad and proud of the opportunity to take part in a hallowed struggle to usher in a beautiful new social order in place of a vicious and stinking society. They were happy that they got an opportunity to show others that Harijans were not beasts of the forest.

The journey that took us to Guruvayoor and resultant propaganda created a new stir and awakening in the country.

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Even old grannies came forward to receive the *Satyagrahis* and give them food. We were thrilled to see venerable elders from families of leading caste Hindus waiting to receive the *jatha* at night. We were given resounding receptions everywhere. Throughout the journey, the *Jatha* caused severe cleavages in orthodoxy. The speeches of Subramanyan Thirumumpu electrified the people. Many caste Hindu leaders were found welcoming the new change. There was practically no opposition at all on the route.

The *Satyagraha* began on November 1. The *Satyagraha* camp was at the eastern gateway of the temple. The camp manager was A. C. Raman. There was C. S. Gopalan to help him. *Satyagrahis* were to be up at 2am and *Satyagraha* would start at 3 o'clock when the temple gates were opened. Two volunteers were posted at each gate and after three hours the volunteers changed. The volunteers thus were able to offer *Satyagraha* from 3am to midnight the following day. Two watchmen were on guard at each gate.

Lord Krishna, beloved of those coming to your feet
Ocean of love, cloud-colored one;
Lord, we who are afflicted are not
Supposed to come to your feet
If thou wanted to hinder us,
Would thou require soldiers and barbed wire?

The *Satyagrahis* used to chant these lines from K. T. Raounny Menon's poem. It touched even the orthodox coming for worship at the temple.

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New songs began to circulate. *Satyagrahis* like Bharatheeyan heightened the tempo of the campaign. Bharatheeyan is a deeply religious individual. *I am a socialist. I must have freedom to don ashes and read the Geetha without going against that ideal* is what Bharatheeyan used to tell co-workers. In the evenings Bharatheeyan would read the Bhagavatham, explaining the text in easily comprehensible idiom. He would be surrounded by a circle of devotees.

People would congregate daily in large numbers to hear the colourful speeches of Mannath Padmanabhan, V. T. Bhattathiripad, N. P. Damodaran, Kelappan, Agamanandan, Vaisravanath Raman Namboodiri and others. N. P. Damodaran was our publicity officer. A talented speaker and writer, he filled the berth with panache. He could speak on any subject with authority. He was equally capable of finding convincing arguments for or against the *Satyagraha* movement when the need arose. His role in the temple entry *Satyagraha* certainly should not be forgotten, but there was a limit to his dedication to our ideals. Those who have understood that will not be perturbed over his present position.

Upon seeing the meetings and speeches of the *Satyagraha* group, the Sanathanists made counter speeches. The chief speaker was Pallyath Kunjunni Achan. Geetha class, yarn spinning etc. were daily routines in the *Satyagraha* camp.

The miseries of the *Satyagrahis* who stood in sun and rain for six hours daily at the same spot were heart-breaking. Along with the volunteers, I also used to participate in the *Satyagraha* as often as was possible. As a result I seldom got more than two hours' sleep.

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People started coming from many places. Money started flowing into the *Satyagraha* fund. People brought gifts in kind to the camp. Some of the offerings to Guruvayoorappan were diverted to the camp. People began to regard the *Satyagraha* camp as something even more sacred than the temple. The discipline and self-sacrificing spirit of the volunteers made me extremely happy.

Subramanyan Thirumumpu was arrested at Guruvayoor on the 7th of November. But this arrest was not in connection with the *Satyagraha*.

The Guruvayoor *Satyagraha* became an All-India affair. Newspapers outside Kerala wrote editorials about it. National leaders visited Kerala. The echoes of the movement were heard everywhere. Private individuals allowed Harijans thoroughfare where there had hitherto been no freedom of travel. People began to take a special interest in the Harijan movement.

From Samoodiri Raja, the owner of the Guruvayoor temple, however, there were no signs of response.

It is possible to win over one's people through love and sacrifice. But that is possible only with people who respond to love. But vested interests who are governed by self-interest cannot be won over through love or self-sacrificial passive resistance. It is futile to expect that.

Moreover, the conservatives all over Kerala created a united front against our movement. Priests, orthodox Namboodiris and Paliathachan, all cooperated with the Samoodiri.

The political climate of the country was changing. Government was getting ready to repress the nationalist move-

ment that had been growing fast after the Gandhi-Irwin pact. On the one side, round-table conferences flourished and on the other, repression of the nationalist movement and arrests of activists. The feeling was widespread that a second agitation was essential. The 1930 struggle, the Gandhi-Irwin pact, picketing, the fast-spreading volunteer movement—all these were sources of serious concern to the organs of Government who were aware that their future depended on their ability to crush.

January 4, 1932 was a red letter day. It put a stop to debates and arguments. Civil liberty no longer existed. The authorities could intern the individual at will and confiscate his property. Leaders were arrested.

Arrests began simultaneously in several places in Kerala. The police Sub-Inspector called me that very morning and talked to me. He said that the *Satyagraha* movement would not be permitted to continue. At 12 that night, N. P. Damodaran and K. Kunjikrishnan (SNDP secretary) and I were all arrested. We were glad that the government was not ready then to bring the temple entry *Satyagraha* to a halt. The movement continued unabated. I was sentenced to six months rigorous imprisonment and taken to Cannanore Jail.

This was my second term in jail. For many reasons it was an important chapter in my political life. It was a time when government authorities unleashed police and jail officials licensed to do anything to repress the nationalist movement. They believed that they could torture the movement out of existence. They did not realise that arrests and punitive *lathi-charges* would only strengthen the movement. A distraught

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and confused officialdom can only think like that. It does not therefore surprise one. There is no doubt that they will one day realise that it is foolish to think that a hungry man asking for bread can be cowed down by *lathis* and brute force. Such an awakening is not far off.

There was a great difference between my first and second terms in jail. A special type of people and a special environment. There were no lawyers or doctors in this group. My friends this time were a group of revolutionaries who functioned among the common people and who were ready to sacrifice even their lives for freedom. They wanted to resist atrocities whether in jail or outside. They never thought of the consequences. They had the stamina, patriotism and dedication to suffer anything.

We were put to work right from the first day in jail. The task given was to pound the husks of 50 coconuts in the scorching midday sun wearing nothing but a loincloth to cover our midriffs. We submitted to that under protest. As we were small in number, we did not want to start an agitation. We worked under great hardship.

More prisoners started arriving. Gradually we began to resist the tortures inflicted by the jail authorities. We started an agitation for a change of diet. In two months, about 400 prisoners had arrived. We declined to work. Brutalities increased. Unfortunately I was mistaken to be the leader of the prisoners and taken to task along with others. The Jail Superintendent was Major Ramanan who was notorious as a tormentor of prisoners. He was not happy without cane charging his prisoners at least once a month. His subordinates

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were no better. *As the master, so the servants.* We conducted an organised struggle against this brutality and won small gains. We decided to lead a disciplined jail life.

Time was not wasted. Should any common issue arise, everyone would join and take a decision and act. Hindi classes were begun. There were daily debates on political issues. We started reading books on the Russian revolution. We reflected upon the changes in Russia after the revolution and the five-year plans. We were sad over the failure of Gandhi-ism. The tendency to reflect on political matters and hold discussions about them and to read political literature was increasing. It dawned on us that the struggle might be a failure and that freedom could only be achieved through a new path. We started thinking in an international context. We realised that the Indian problem was related to the world problem. We learnt many lessons from this. Some novels like *Rotti-ke Saval* were also read. We also held group readings of some books on socialism smuggled into the jail. There were in the jail detenu prisoners from Bengal and Bhagat Singh's co-worker, Comrade Tiwari. Unknown to jail officials, I visited them in their cell and talked to them. A keen interest in terrorist activities was aroused in me.

Some of the co-prisoners became my best friends. Association with them helped me a good deal in my political activities.

Comrade P. Krishna Pillai attracted me most—a first rate campaigner. He was interested in nothing but politics, was prepared to suffer anything, willing to eat any kind of food. He was to be found at all times discussing politics with some-

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one or other. Our connection became very strong indeed later on. We suffered and worked jointly. Of those who nurtured me politically he takes the lead after Comrade Namboodiripad. I still remember a number of occasions when we starved together and worked together in a famished condition. Both of us would share food procured with whatever little money that we had. We would spread a *Mathrubhoomi* newspaper in the union office at Calicut and sleep side by side on it. We would jointly set out in the morning. Returning in the evening, we would eat contentedly with the two or four annas that he or I had. How many days of starvation! My Comrade's mental strength, that made him greet any hardship with a smile, excited my admiration.

I found in him many of the qualities necessary in a leader. If he was not able to bring home his point through theoretical discourse, he would achieve his purpose through sheer eloquence. But he was not dogmatic and paid heed to the views of others.

The second in my ranking was Comrade Chandroth. A moustache that awed everyone, an inspiring nature; a patriot who resigned his job in protest against the hanging of Bhagat Singh (He was then in the army). We functioned together until 1939.

The third was Comrade K. P. R. Gopalan, an extremely versatile individual. In jail he played chess most of the time. He was not affected at all by the hardship of jail life. A good singer, he would sing for at least half an hour a day in jail. A brave man who regarded life itself as a light burden. A person with absolutely unshakeable convictions. Our bonds were so

close that he would call me Gopalettan. He was to become an extremist in later days. I believe that he has learnt from experience that extremism is a blunder.

At this juncture I was able to meet many of Kerala's important contemporary political figures. K. A. Damodara Menon was then a good friend of mine. Mukherjee, a prisoner from Bengal, once said that Gopalan could be seen wherever Damodara Menon was. We were always together. I never imagined even in my dreams that I would have to separate from him at a later stage. Politics, after all, is not the school-master's logic.

Brutalities were on the increase. There was occasional torture too. Prisoners started disregarding jail authorities. Some started ridiculing them. Coconuts were plucked from coconut palms in the jail and eaten. There was a military-type march past every morning. I played a notable part in all this and I anticipated a clash.

The Jail authorities prepared for brutalities. The alarm rang at 9 o'clock on a certain Sunday. Jail wardens entered our block and started beating us indiscriminately. They saw me first. I was beaten by 15 people who surrounded me. They went on beating me until they were tired out. They kicked me into the cell and locked me up along with the others. Terrible cruelty. Everyone was beaten up—those relaxing and those washing. I scolded the wardens from inside the room as they were returning triumphantly after the attack. They opened the door. Comrade Krishna Pillai and I were separated from others and beaten. Two *lathis* snapped. Injuries all over the body. Clothes drenched with blood. We were asked after-

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wards to walk. We walked with the wardens around us. We were taken to another block, and beaten even while walking.

An interesting incident occurred. One of the wardens was a hunchback and we used to make fun of him. He was a cart-puller. We would call him Cart warden, and emit cart-driving sounds whenever he came into sight. He hated us. He was unable to come in time to join in the beating exercise. When it was nearing its end, he came drenched in sweat. He was sorry that it was all over. He was however able to beat us to his satisfaction. While returning he said: *Alas, I could not reach in time. There were four or five others too. I may get an opportunity to beat them later. Anyway, I got the leaders. A stroke of luck.*

We were locked up for twelve hours. We were unconscious. The other prisoners thought that we were dying. The news reached the town. People collected in front of the jail. The Superintendent approached us. By that time, we had started a hunger strike. It was withdrawn on the assurance that some facilities would be allowed.

After a few days, I was summoned to the office and told that I was to be transferred to Cuddalore Jail. I was transferred on a report from the Superintendent that I was the cause of all the trouble and that I should be given stern punishment.

Cuddalore jail is in South Arcot. It is a small jail. There were about 50 B class prisoners there at the time. I was taken to the block where mad prisoners were kept. A fat warden came and took me there. Asked where I was being taken, he replied: *to the mad men's block*. I was in tears the moment I saw the place, and thoroughly shaken up. Yes, I was a mad man

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to officialdom. It may be madness in the eyes of imperialists to work for the independence of the country of one's birth. There are many types of madness. I am proud to say that I am a 'political lunatic'. It is certain that that madness will not leave me until imperialism is wiped out. It is my wish that this madness does not disappear as long as oppression remains in the world. A group of prisoners did not even hide their nakedness, some were poor prisoners who had become lunatics and semi-lunatics as a result of the miseries of jail life and the blows inflicted by wardens. I was greeted with the words, *Hey, Congress lunatic*. I could not eat. I was lodged with them at night. I could not sleep. Every five minutes they would start wrangling with each other. One would bite the ear of the other. The wardens would immediately start beating us all. I felt certain that my life was in danger. However, I was ready to suffer anything.

I started a hunger strike the next day. It went on for six days. Jail authorities did not care. I finally stopped the hunger strike on the assurance of the Superintendent that I would be lodged in a separate room.

I felt sympathy for my fellow prisoners—children of the present rotten social order. They could not live outside. On the one side, harassment by local chieftains and on the other harassment by officialdom. In jail they were treated just like beasts. Anybody could beat or kill them. They did not wish to live. These prisoners became my friends. They were a living embodiment of the indescribable achievements of 150 years of imperialist rule. They even beat me sometimes. I did not feel sorry about it at all. To escape their blows, I often used

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to share my food with them. There was nothing but chaos and confusion there. I could not eat or sleep. Three months of Cuddalore life swallowed up 30 pounds of my weight. I finally came out an emaciated and sick man.

There were in the jail before me a boy of 16 from Travancore who had been arrested in the civil disobedience movement and was lodged in the Cannanore Jail, Sri Chathu Nambiar of Azhekkode and two other Congressman from Andhra. They had been sentenced and transferred there long ago. The boy finally became stark mad. Our nursing improved his condition somewhat. Oddly enough he would beat me even as I nursed him.

While in jail, I used to think about the temple entry *Satyagraha*. I wanted to rejoin the struggle as soon as possible. Although the Guruvayoor temple was still closed to Harijans, I saw that the movement had created an impetus for social change throughout the country. It led to a transformation everywhere.

There arose the feeling that untouchable communities should progress and develop. Temple entry and freedom of movement were their elementary rights. The movement awakened a large section of caste Hindus to the inequity of so many traditional customs. The movement gave birth to a large number of Harijan social workers. Political leaders could not focus attention on this matter as it was a time of intense political struggle and of severe repression by the authorities throughout the country. Some political workers were against the temple entry struggle being held at a time when political struggles were going on. To them it seemed

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a reactionary programme. Nevertheless, Kelappan and the *Satyagrahis* continued the campaign. At the end of my prison term, I functioned once more as a *Satyagraha* captain.

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I left jail a sick man. My body was covered with injuries from the hardships and brutalities of jail life. Doctors and friends asked me to rest for some time. Rest! I could not even think of it. As a dedicated campaigner for freedom how could I think of rest when the entire land was echoing with the sound of *lathi charges*, when thousands of people were entering the battle arena and when a determined struggle was in progress? To fall back now would have been contrary to my nature. Then, as now, I had an agitator's mentality. Whether it be against imperialism, feudalism, capitalism or orthodoxy, I have always yearned to live amidst the struggle, to breathe the air of agitation, to fight reactionaries, to court arrest. Such is my nature. I have tried to create turmoil even during 'peace time'. I was therefore scornful of those who advised rest. For that I would await the day when I could rest on the ashes of imperialist domination.

The Paralasserry village political conference was held on the day after I returned home. Village political conferences were the form of civil disobedience priorities of the day. They had assumed the dimensions of small scale guerilla warfare

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campaigns. A meeting would be announced a week before the day it was convened. The names of the President and inaugurator would be announced and immediately the whole place would be filled with policemen. They would do everything to prevent the meeting from being held. Foiling them, Congressmen would hold the meeting. I still remember a few interesting examples of this.

A meeting was organised on one occasion at Varnasseri near Cannanore. The police vowed that they would not allow it to be held. The meeting was to be at 7 in the morning. The police kept the place surrounded from the previous night. No one was allowed to pass that way. We disguised our President in a police Inspector's outfit. He calmly moved amongst the policemen. Some police Inspectors had come from outside. The local police did not know them. Taking our President to be one of those Inspectors, the police started saying 750, Sir, 305, Sir. The President reached the appointed place at the end. He removed the disguise and appeared in *khadi* clothes. In no time, people came singly from many corners and the meeting was held.

The police became more and more exasperated and furious. Once we arranged a meeting at Valappattanam. The police began patrolling the banks of the river and the river itself. They boasted that this time the meeting would be prevented. We boarded the President and other volunteers on a country craft dressed in fishermen's attire, and topi-kuda or wide brimmed hats made of palm leaves. One of the volunteers started casting the net every now and again as a fisherman does. The police boats approached ours. They took us to be

real fishermen. *Who are you?* they asked. *We are fishermen, sir; we are catching fish,* we replied. *Go soon,* they ordered. Towards dawn, the fishermen changed into Congressmen. The enraged policemen arrested all of them and beat them up in the lock-up.

The agitation centres this time were Calicut and Cannanore. Cannanore in particular had an unequalled position. Picketing took place in small villages as in towns. Several taverns had to be closed at Chombal near Mahe because of persistent picketing. The Youth League organised picketing at Orkatteri, Vallikad, Puthiyangadi and other places. When the League was outlawed, its leaders came out.

The Youth League of Comrade K. P. Gopalan played a large role in this struggle. The Youth League meeting was held close to the Gnana Pradeepa institution. All the members who attended were severely beaten up by the police.

One cannot omit mentioning the names of some prominent Congress political workers of the time. Mullankandi Raghavan was the best of these. It was he who led the agitation at Cannanore. A very able young man, he was at ease with all classes of society. He had a large part to play in the Travancore agitation too. There was no middle class family in Travancore which did not think fondly of Raghavan.

I developed a close association at this time with people like Krishnan, 'writer' of Wheel Andhra Company, Manikkota Narayanaettan, Unni, 'writer', Kittayi, Manikkoth Kumaran, Chatta Krishnan, C. K. Unni and Potheri Damodaran.

While involved with the Harijan movement, I met Krishnan (Tailor Krishnan). I had close links with him until 1935.

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Unfortunately, because of political differences, I had to sever contacts with him later. He lacked sound political instincts and started attacking party workers individually when party work began and sided with the capitalists. I cannot say what his present ideology is. Anyway, he was of great help at that time to Congress workers like me. Particularly during times of struggle, his entire family undertook great sacrifices.

Right from 1930, I was in close association with Samuel Aron and Mrs. Aron. They gave me a great deal of encouragement after I set out on the path of revolutionary struggle. But afterwards he became the sworn enemy of the Socialist Party in Kerala, and today of the Communist Party. Mr. Aron would speak out openly. He once told me jokingly: *I will try as far as possible to destroy you. I will divide you. I will create family feuds. I will win over one section of the family with money. I will see whether some of you too can be neutralised with money. If all these fail and you set up your government, you will kill me. Before that happens I will shoot myself.*

Although he said this in jest, I know now from experience that most of what he said was meant seriously. Although moved by the aim of frustrating Communists, he has done a lot of work in relief operations. Aron was one leader who openly led anti-Communist agitations. We worked together mostly during the Central Assembly election. Known as *Kachiyamma*, Mrs. Aron is an ideal woman. Whatever be one's political opinion, she has always been completely free of mean personal animosity.

Another notable figure was the late L. S. Prabhu. We worked jointly for some time as State Congress President

and Secretary. He was very brave. He spoke frankly and openly regardless of the consequences. But he was not tactful. He would say anything (true and untrue) about enemies, co-workers included.

I was thus associated with several Congress leaders during the time of the second agitation. While in jail and outside I got into touch with people like Raghava Menon, Sankara Narayana Menon and Gopalan Unni.

The police indicted me under Section 144 IPC a day prior to the Paralasserry meeting. This infuriated me. I had wanted to rejoin the Guruvayoor *Satyagraha* struggle. Moreover, I understood from friends and relatives that mere law-breaking and going to jail would serve no useful purpose. I stayed at home in anger. Arrangements for the meeting were made.

The meeting took place at 7 o'clock in the morning. The President was a 64-year old woman. A rumour spread that the police had beaten her. Volunteers had been beaten severely and had run away. I was very excited and angry. I assembled all the volunteers and took out another procession. We challenged the police and demonstrated outside the police station. The police were frightened. Nothing untoward occurred.

I resumed duties as *Satyagraha* captain at Guruvayoor. Srimathi Kamalavathi was captain while I was in jail. Earlier we had worked jointly during the 1931 picketing. She had worked in Bombay in 1930. She was a very active, brave and zestful young lady, but did not know how to behave tactfully. This created some problems. She could not escape from the scandals that surround young ladies who undertake public activities in India. Besides Srimathi Kamalavathi, there were

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Srimathi Devaki Amma and Kunjikkavamma in the *Satyagraha* camp.

The *Satyagraha* movement was slowly stagnating. The *Satyagraha* and songs and speeches lost their novelty and became routine matters. There is no doubt that this movement had led to a vast social upheaval throughout Kerala. It was also true that it had led to great changes in Guruvayoor and neighbouring areas. everyone began to doubt whether the Guruvayoor temple would be opened to Harijans after all. The movement was unable to change the mind of Samoodiri, the owner of the temple, and of the communal orthodoxy. Many *Satyagrahis* and sympathisers lost faith in *Satyagraha* as a means for psychological change. I pondered over how to generate a new awakening and enthusiasm. As noted above, great changes had come about in many families in and around Guruvayoor as a result of the temple entry *Satyagraha*. Dr. P. G. Nair was the soul of the movement. Vadakkekara Balan was the youth leader. The help of K. P. Karunakara Menon, Dr. Thomas and others was also considerable. Help came thus from many sources. Excepting the Brahmins who lived off the temple, a large section of caste Hindus themselves were sympathetic.

The movement also had its impact on young students, both men and women. Students like Srimathi Meenakshi, Madhavi and Padmavathi used to visit the camp.

I noticed a young student who was one of our visitors. A fair thin youth used to appear at the camp daily after school. He did not speak much. He would weep if anyone spoke to him angrily. This young student was none other than Com-

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rade Unniraja who rose to be one of the leaders of the Kerala Party. It was young men like him that the movement was able to bring into the political field.

Something happened in the meantime. Comrade Krishna Pillai entered the temple one day. The rule is that the bell in front of the archway can be touched only by Namboodiris and not by Nairs. Comrade Krishna Pillai rang the bell. The guards on duty beat him up. This helped to an extent in breaking the ice.

I decided to create a new awakening in the movement. Many used to come for the public meeting in the evening. There were talented singers like Appuk unjan among the volunteers. The volunteers started a programme of devotional music after the meeting. They sang new and attractive songs. The volunteers would return to the camp after circling the four gateways in procession. The crowd that came for the meeting would stay for the music.

The music attracted more and more people. Temple authorities were frightened of this new tactic. About a thousand people attended the *bhajana* one day. The temple authorities were afraid that the crowd would storm the temple. They also assembled a large crowd. I was leading the *bhajana* and I ventured a little beyond the fence at the western gate. The crowd nearby started beating and kicking me. I was knocked to the ground. They continued to beat me. The people were incensed when they heard that I had been assaulted. There was a large group of Muslims among them. Muslims were very sympathetic towards the *Satyagraha* movement. Volunteers pacified the crowd and falling at their feet requested

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them to be calm. The people did not listen. Fearing a riot, the enemies stopped the attack. Somebody picked me up and took me outside. I asked the people to remain calm. They were satisfied with that. I was then taken to the house of Dr. P. G. Nair. The attack had a very bad effect on my physique. I was not even able to swallow food.

My brother Padmanabhan Nambiar was at Guruvayoor at the time. He did not believe in *Satyagraha* and self-imposed passive suffering. He believed in opposing violence with violence. The news that I had been assaulted reached him. Angered, he came with some followers half an hour after the incident and beat up everyone in sight. The timid temple workers closed the doors and remained inside. Everyone was upset. There was general confusion and unrest. Although I had not envisaged all this, this incident put an end to the inertia, but in an unexpected way. Instead of the call *open the temple* there was an outcry that we break into the temple. Throughout the neighbourhood, people were keyed up. Temple authorities stopped coming outdoors. Some timid Brahmins approached me with protestations of their innocence. They even feared for their lives. Many people were intent on destroying the temple. Some even made preparations for that purpose. The people were dissuaded by the entreaties of the *Satyagraha* organisers.

After this incident, the temple remained closed until Jan. 28. All this while, the *Satyagrahis* would go up to the archway and remain there. When the temple was re-opened on the 29th, *Satyagraha* was resumed at the original site. Later, a prohibitory order under the Fifth Ordinance of

1932 was promulgated banning entry beyond 50 yards of the temple walls.

For nearly a month afterwards, I was under Kakkanat Mami Vaidyar's treatment. Mami Vaidyar and more particularly his son contributed greatly to the movement.

I felt that even Kelappan was slightly disappointed. Anyway, he did not want the *Satyagraha* to continue in this manner. He decided therefore to sacrifice his life for the cause.

September 1932 was to mark the finale of the Guruvayoor *Satyagraha*. Kelappan decided to fast until the temple was opened. The committee accepted the decision reluctantly.

Kelappan started his fast in a small *shamiana* outside the temple. He bid farewell to the volunteers before the start of the fast. It was a very touching moment. We, the volunteers, were afraid that Kelappan might succumb. However, we were ready to offer not only his but our own lives for the cause. We insisted on fasting along with Kelappan. But this was disallowed. Kelappan fasted under vow. I fasted without making a vow.

Kelappan's fast stirred the whole of India. Volunteer *jathas* started for Guruvayoor from all parts of Kerala. Samoodiri Raja received telegrams from many places. Both in and out of Kerala vast public meetings were held. A caste Hindu public meeting was held at Guruvayoor on a grand scale. All the caste Hindu leaders of Kerala came for this meeting. The President was Mattannor Madhusudhan Tangal who was an aristocratic Namboodiri. Some 10,000 people attended the meeting. That huge meeting proved that the whole of Kerala was behind us in the matter of temple entry. A gentleman

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named Krishna Bhat offered *Satyagraha* outside the Samoodiri's palace. Some of the palace women of his household came to Guruvayoor. Namboodiri youths determined to do anything and entered the stage. Harijans were granted entry into some small temples owned by private individuals. A great general upsurge. Public meetings and signature campaigns went on throughout Kerala. The Samoodiri was worried. The government too was upset. *Death or victory*. It was decided to offer the *Satyagraha* inside the temple. K. A. Damodara Menon, Srimathi Karthyayini Amma and others got ready for that.

Our enemies spread many rumours about the fast. They were scared of the repercussions of Kelappan's death. Youngsters who had lost faith in *Satyagraha* started searching for other methods. The Samoodiri approached the government. The government too was apprehensive of what this mass struggle might lead to.

Guruvayoor became a resort of national leaders and lovers of humanity. It became an All-India problem that attracted the attention of leaders of All-India stature. People like U. Gopala Menon were extremely upset. They were more worried over Kelappan's health than the opening of the temple to the Harijans. They wired to Gandhiji. A great effort began to persuade Kelappan to end the fast. Karur Namboodiripad left for North India to meet leaders.

Finally, on the tenth day, a telegram arrived from Gandhiji with a request that the fast be abandoned temporarily and with an assurance that he would be personally responsible for future programmes. I was not in favour of ending the fast.

I would not have regretted the death of a dozen leaders like Kelappan in an effort to end the centuries' old oppression and injustice inflicted on one group of people by another. I believed that the popular indignation springing from Kelappan's death would be strong enough to crack the bedrock of orthodoxy, which was already under severe pressure. I believe that people like K. Madhava Nair who played a considerable role in the *Satyagraha* movement from its inception did not agree with this view. Anyway Kelappan stopped the fast under the pressure of circumstances, and the protest movement also reached its finale on a low key.

It was decided that a *jatha* should tour the whole of Kerala to propagate temple entry. It could exploit the favourable atmosphere created by Kelappan's fast. We started with 20 *Satyagrahis* including Subramanyan Thirumumpu and N. P. Damodaran who were our speakers. It was decided to tour Cochin first and then Travancore and Malabar. The whole Travancore programme was arranged by Mannath Padmanabha Pillai. Both the Nair Service Society and the SNDP combined in the venture to make our programme a success.

It was decided to hold a referendum in Ponnani sub-district to find out the extent of mass support for temple entry. The signatures of caste Hindus were collected. Kasturi Bai Gandhi visited Kerala. Her visit gave a great fillip to the referendum propaganda work. A group of Congress workers prepared themselves for referendum work. The referendum was speedily completed. It was found that the majority were in favour of temple entry.

15,568 voted in favour of temple entry and 2,779 against.

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2,106 remained who did not express any preference. 7,302 abstained from the referendum. In all 77 per cent were in favour of temple entry. That was no mean achievement of the *Satyagraha*.

We were warmly welcomed everywhere in Cochin and Travancore. We realised that this movement had more or less been able to root out untouchability. People vied with each other to receive us. Caste Hindus came to the fore to show their sympathy for the cause. Sankara Menon informed us that he was ready to open his temple when our *jatha* reached Adoor. But, because of pressure from the Cochin royal family, this could not be done.

The march of the *jatha* through Travancore was extremely grand—vast crowds, enthusiastic receptions. Nair, Namboodiri and Ezhava joined to receive us. The speeches of Mannath Padmanabha Pillai, Thirumumpu and N. P. Damodaran delighted and inspired us.

The meeting at Trivandrum was unforgettable. Led by Sri Bodheswaran, 4,000 people including law college students welcomed us and conducted a huge procession. 30,000 people attended the public meeting in the evening. I think it is not incorrect to regard the march of the *jatha* in Travancore as a forerunner of the temple entry proclamation that was issued there later.

Another significant thing happened at the Trivandrum public meeting. Pattom Thanu Pillai wanted to make a speech welcoming the *jatha*. But the people did not allow him to speak. He said that he had come not to speak but to welcome the *jatha*. *Whatever it be, do not utter a word. Where were you*

during the picketing? We want people who act, not those who speak. The people said this and did not allow him to say a word. A mighty crowd and that too in Trivandrum city. The best speakers of Kerala belonged to Trivandrum. I did not know how far they would relish my northern slang. It was therefore with some trepidation that I walked to the platform as the first speaker. *I am not a speaker, but only a fighter. I and my friends will be before you if there is a struggle.* When I said this, the people replied: *That's just what we want. We only want to hear such people.* Subramanya Thirumumpu made up for the shortcomings of my speech through his learned Sanskritised one.

At the end of the march through Travancore we began the tour of Malabar. We travelled right upto the Malabar border of Kanchangad. There was a novel feature in this march. A charming child accompanied us. She was 10-year-old Madhavi. She amazed us all by her precosity. Even the elderly were won over by her.

The Poet's line *How many writers were cruelly aborted in your womb, Mother Kerala* came to my mind as I watched that child. She was undaunted by weariness. Another child who charmed everyone was a Harijan boy named Unnikrishnan. He too helped to lighten our failing spirits. We fell to thinking about how the devil of orthodoxy had fattened itself on the blood of delightful children like these.

Unnikrishnan later became a prominent Harijan social worker. He is not with us today. Death has taken him away from us.

While touring North Malabar, the *jatha* passed through

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the village where I was born. The young people of the place gave our *jatha* a grand reception. A public meeting was held at Paralasserry school. My father did not attend it, as he did not approve of it. My mission also offended a few relatives. My brother-in-law was so angry that he left home with my sister. A general confusion reigned in the household. This was all very painful for me. But I was glad that most of the people were with me. The *jatha* was disbanded at Kanchangad. We had covered about 1,000 miles on foot, taken part in 500 public meetings, and got acquainted with numerous families.

We were able to convince the people that untouchability was a dangerous cancer imbedded in Indian society. This also was the stage when I retired from the Harijan struggle and re-entered the stage of political struggle.

A sad thing happened at this time. It is known only to a few of my old friends and is still secret from others. It made me very unhappy. I was a married man. I had married just before embarking on my political struggles. I consented to marry under pressure from father. I had to marry his niece according to custom. My association with my wife was very limited. After marriage I was either in jail or in the *Satyagraha* movement. To sever connections with the family, and not to marry, were I thought what was expected of a revolutionary. It was only later on that I learnt that this was a mistaken notion I wanted to be the foremost among revolutionaries. However, under pressure of circumstances, I got married. I tried later to become a revolutionary by disassociating myself from my relatives and my wife. I did not endeavour to accommodate my relatives or to bring them closer to my ideology. Such

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an extraordinary person was I! I have gone to jail. I have spread national feelings among the people, participated in the *Satyagraha* movement and created a revulsion against orthodoxy in the country. But I failed to create that spirit in the people closest to myself; in my wife and family. Nor did I try to. I did not realise that that was my first obligation. I did not understand the blunder of trying to reform the world without reforming one's own family, nor that it was a part of the general effort for the country. I have suffered greatly for this great error of judgement. It has taught me a bitter lesson.

The opposition of my father and relatives came to a climax with the temple entry *Satyagraha*. My wife had to suffer abuse at home. She found it difficult to carry on without me. She wanted to accompany me. I did not know whether it was love of me or of the country that prompted her. I explained to her the difficulties of living with me. She gave her word that she was willing to suffer all that. I was relieved. I was eager to educate her. I took her to Kelappan's Harijan ashram, Pakkanarpuram, and put her up there. After two days I left for Calicut. Taking advantage of this opportunity, her uncle came to the ashram, lied that her father was no more and took her away. She was confined to his house. I heard of this and decided to visit her house. I wanted to apologise to her relatives for my mistake. I thought I would be able to convince my wife who was not sufficiently educated politically. I failed. She would not talk to me. I could not even see her. I knew that she loved me. But she did not have the courage to rebel against customs and come with me. It was my fault, not hers. She did not remarry for four or five years. She did however

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marry again at a later date. I am happy that she did. So she also deserted me. A partner who was ready to share life's happiness, the burdens of my sorrow and work—she too left me! Why? The answer is not far to seek. I am a political worker and a revolutionary who has courted hardships. But some of my relatives were senior officials. Outcaste and Harijan peons used to enter their homes and work in them. Nobody used to say anything about that. Silver coins are strong enough to pacify the cry of untouchability. To flourish the banner of orthodoxy it is sufficient that one can distribute largesse. My relatives did not lack that. I have lived my life in the belief that it can and will stop or be stopped.

Marriage—I was disenchanted with it. It is only a matter of business. An investment. Its best friend is the rich man. To marry a political leader is like garlanding hardships and brutalities and to welcome them voluntarily. Until there are young women who are willing to suffer anything and who possess a corresponding political sense, marriage can be nothing but a burden to a public worker; a serious handicap. May she not be the knife cutting the throat of his principles? I learnt a lesson from marriage. I learnt it at the cost of severe mental anguish. Women today have no freedom. They have no freedom to marry someone whom they like and who is closest to their hearts. Even deliverance from the despotism of an undesired husband is not possible for them. They have no economic freedom. A time will come when love of one's fellow-men is no longer an offence. A time when a real patriot will be welcome everywhere. A time when women can lead their lives without having to become man's slave. I consoled

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myself with the thought that readiness to sacrifice even one's life is the only way to make such a dream a reality.

It was while in hiding later on that I could sense the virtues of family life. After I was free, I often wished for a married life, although motivated by a different reason. But it is natural for a cat who has jumped into hot water to be afraid even of cold water. A happy married life is not easy for a political worker like me. As long as the inequitable social order of the past exists in the present there are bound to be many obstacles. Therefore the catastrophe of my married life only reinforced my belief that the existing social order must be wholly destroyed if one is to partake of any happiness.

Like a wick in an oil-less lamp, the civil disobedience movement was flickering. There were occasional processions and arrests in Calicut and Cannanore. Everyone realised that the cause was on the verge of failure. I tried to give vigour to the picketing at Cannanore. Before long I was arrested and sentenced to one and a half years' imprisonment.

I was in the Cannanore Central jail for about fifteen days. According to their records I was a dangerous prisoner. I expected that I would soon be moved to another jail.

Within a month I was taken to Bellary. Bellary jail was notorious. It was a hell for *class C* political prisoners. I was sent there with a certificate that I was dangerous and should be suitably chastised. Anyway, I decided to obey whatever the jail authorities ordered and to live as far as possible without creating any scenes.

Jail authorities started treating me inhumanly from the moment I arrived in Bellary jail. I was given the task of turning

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the grind-stone. I could not do that. I was taken to task and confined with a pole chain. One inch wide iron rings encircled each of my ankles. Hanging from them were two iron balls weighing 20 pounds. It used to be fixed to another iron ring and would remain fixed even while I slept. This was called a pole chain. Although I found it hard to bear, it became a source of amusement to me after a time. After a month, I was detailed to pound flour. The work tired me out in a week. Finally, they ordered me into solitary confinement by day and night.

Comrade Kammampadi Satyanarayan, who was a leader of the Andhra Party, was also confined to a room like me. Unable to bear the miseries of jail life we had written secretly to V. V. Narayanan Nambiar and Jagannath Das. I realised later from the brutalities inflicted on us that the letters had been intercepted.

Dirty food and solitary confinement—both these tormented me greatly. I started losing weight. I decided finally to fast. The fast began. As I was already weak, it was not easy this time. On the seventh day, they started nose-feeding me. I protested against such treatment. Some 20 people would pin me down as I was nose-fed with milk. I had burning fever on the 10th day, lost consciousness and was hospitalised. I was administered medicine and milk, and then moved to Vellore as *class B* prisoner.

I stayed at Vellore jail for about two months. There I pondered over the *Satyagraha* movement. I discovered some changes in my thinking. I now lacked faith in conversion of heart. I regarded *ahimsa* as no more than a political strat-

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egy. The Guruvayoor *Satyagraha* was a great achievement. It had strengthened the agitation to achieve the basic objectives of temple entry and freedom of movement. But everyone regarded temple entry as a communal issue. Harijans were poor. They had nothing of their own but their toiling bodies. They did not own an inch of land, nor a place to dwell in. They could not dwell where others lived. They were always dependent on others for their existence. They had no means to better themselves. What they touched, others would not touch.

They must be given the opportunity to progress, to own houses of their own and land to till. Only then will the present inequalities disappear. They will not get a better living as long as they live on other people's land, as long as they are the slaves of others and as long as they live in economic dependence on others. The economic roots of untouchability have to be cut. For that they must own their own houses, be able to command good education and access to social services.

Even after temple entry many Harijans would be unable to visit temples. How can people who have no change of clothes to wear visit temples? Without economic freedom it would be impossible for Harijans to better themselves. Such thoughts, passed through my mind.

Mass civil disobedience gave place to individual civil disobedience. Civil disobedience failed once again. It was clear that freedom cannot be achieved merely through a programme of going to jail. Gandhi-ism had proved a failure. Unless peasants and workers fight in the forefront, freedom cannot be achieved. And they cannot be mobilised

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by appeals for *Swaraj*. *Swaraj* is something other than that. They have some urgent problems and needs. To a peasant his nearest enemy is the landlord. That their landlord is a Congressman, does not improve their condition. The peasant is overburdened with heavy rents. Without relief from this problem, the peasant cannot take a single step forward.

The same is the case with the worker. He toils from morning till evening. He does not even have trade union rights. His wages are minimal. He will not come forward until he gets a living wage. If the Congress failed to organise peasants and workers separately, fight for their immediate necessities and win their confidence, they would not enter the freedom struggle. They must be convinced that freedom means freedom for the poor to grow and develop. Such were the thoughts that passed through my mind. I was drawing closer to *Socialism*.

I was released from jail towards the end of 1933.

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When civil disobedience was suspended in 1934. Young people who had courted imprisonment and had otherwise taken part in the nationalist movement lost their faith in the policies and programmes followed hitherto by the nationalist movement. Opinion was growing among them that a new policy and programme of action was the need of the day. It was increasingly felt that this would only be possible if the nationalist movement was under Marxist leadership. In all countries except Soviet Russia, hunger and unemployment were on the increase; nationalists increasingly started paying attention to Russia. There was no hunger and unemployment there. All men and women were employed. Everyone had work according to his ability and wages according to work, universal literacy and basic comforts of life. A social system monopolised by the idle few was non-existent there. Women enjoyed the same freedom as men. The old order in which women lived as slaves of men and danced to their tune without any economic freedom no longer existed. They had laid the foundations of a magnificent social system that was free of exploitation and oppression, in which one did not corner

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the fruits of another's labour, in which it was impossible to see anyone suffering from hunger or uncared for in sickness. In fact the Russian social system had begun to spread its fragrance even over the rotten social fabric of capitalist countries in the form of social service legislation. The oppressed classes of capitalist countries were beginning to look upon Russia's munificent social system with longing. How was it achieved? How did they conduct their struggles? How did the people of that country overcome bureaucracy and the misdeeds of the Czar? What was the part played in this by peasants and workers and the educated middle classes? A large section of those who participated in the nationalist struggles in India from 1930 to 1934 decided to examine this and to adopt a similar programme, modified to suit the different conditions in India. Russia gave inspiration and hope to the oppressed people all over the world. The world capitalist class and the imperialist autocracy trembled at this.

Why is it that struggles waged for two and a quarter years with remarkable courage, intelligence and magnificent self-dedication were a failure? It was clear to one section that the struggle had failed on account of the lack of confidence of the Congress leadership, their fears that an ebullient movement with the active participation of the common man would end in a national upsurge and their secret desire to avert such a mass revolution as far as possible. According to leaders like Babu Rajendra Prasad, the people were ready for sacrifice—to go to jail, to undergo brutality and hardship—but were not ready to suffer financial loss. That was why the struggle did not succeed. They held that it was against truth and *ahimsa* to

hoard money and other assets and to make special arrangements for their safe-keeping. According to them, the struggle failed as the government realised this and confiscated property and imposed heavy fines—this frightened away some. However, most of the people of India do not have wealth to hoard or lose. It is they who should be in the forefront of the freedom struggle. Their only assets are their bodies; they have nothing to lose so they are ready for sacrifice. They do not suffer in the freedom struggle even a percentage of their sufferings in daily life. Why then did they not participate in the struggle fully? This was the viewpoint of another section.

It was these views and opinions that led, after 1934, to the formation of a group known as the *Congress Socialist Party (CSP)* inside the Congress.

One of the reasons for the failure of civil disobedience was that it did not enjoy the organised backing of a large section of peasants and workers as it should have done. The Congress did not approach the masses in the right way. Is the sense of freedom absent in peasants and workers? Don't they wish to be free? Are they free of hardships? Are they not willing to suffer for freedom? Are they in fit circumstances for that? If the answer to these questions is *Yes*, then why is it that this vast section of the people did not enter the arena with eagerness and enthusiasm? The reasons for this must be considered.

What is the worker's position? He must work from morning till evening. He must suffer the kicks and blows of his employers. He must bribe supervisors. Ten hours' work a day—he is a living corpse by evening. He does not have the

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strength even to walk home. What does he get in return? Not even enough money to meet the basic necessities of life and a trip to the factory next day to make some more profit for the capitalist. The barest wage. He cannot even dream of life's smallest comforts. His life is a story of a struggle for existence, privations and agony. He has no faith in his own strength or ability. He resists committing suicide only because, unknown even to himself, there are germs of a revolutionary sense in him. He does not find a single well-wisher in the world. His so called betters assume that he has been created as a machine to toil for the rich, fortunate classes. Fate and destiny are the philosophies with which they console themselves.

Even more pitiable is the condition of peasants. Extortionist land rent, debts and taxes. He loses when the landlord is out of sorts, unhappy or in a hurry. Every death and birth in the landlord's house means an additional burden to the tenant. He has to work more for nothing. He has to look after the landlord's cattle free. He has to stand guard at the gates. He has to stand aside bowing low. He cannot wear good clothes. What he does wear should not come down to the knees. He should not look prosperous. His women-folk should not be fair-complexioned. The lamp of knowledge should not light up the peasant's mind. The peasant should not touch or even approach his social superiors for whom he toils.

Planting, manuring, physical labour, keeping guard—none of these ordeals face the landlord; he is even immune to the scarcity of or devastation by rain. His only authority is the stamp and seal of the government that decrees the land is his. If the crop fails on account of cyclone

or flood or lack of rain or other mishaps, the landlord is unaffected. Nor does a fall in prices of foodgrains affect him. *I must get what has been stipulated.* Otherwise, the government and law are there to get it for him. But it is not easy for the peasant to distinguish between friend and foe. He thinks that the whole world is against him. He holds fast to the superstitions and social mores of a feudal society. He firmly believes that he cannot go a single step beyond these in this life. *Twin-footed beasts who harvest for others.* How aptly the poet's words capture the shocking reality of the peasant's existence.

Back from jail, I studied the living conditions of two peasant families in the locality. The experience created a storm in my mind. I tried to study peasant life in Chirakkal sub-district in this perspective. A small family with father, mother and four children. They were excellent farmers. However, following two years of crop failure, a small plot which was their only property was sold to clear rent arrears. They were then living in a valley at the foot of a hill. Rocky terrain. Just half an acre of land. No yield at all. Still, they had to pay a considerable rent annually. If a circus tent consisting of four dilapidated walls covered by some twigs can be called a house, they had a house. There were two jack-fruit trees and four or five banana plants grown with great difficulty. The jack-fruits were the landlord's. The peasant of course had the honour to stand guard over them until the landlord carried them away and to delight in how big they were growing. The children used to quarrel over how they would run for them when their father plucked them after they were ripe and how they would

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cook and eat them. The bananas would have to be offered to the landlord for Onam and Vishu. The leaves of the plant were the landlord's. The peasant did not even get the tender skin. The house had only one room. It stood trembling between four shaking walls. It had no wooden door. The family had the largeness of heart to welcome all the passing dogs and crows. Windows were non-existent. For want of annual thatching, the angry roof (or its namesake) had separated itself from the walls two years ago. It stood ready to depart with the next strong gust of wind.

Our farmer was 50. He was a day-labourer. Wages: 4 annas. He had to work 20 days in the month. The eldest son was 20. He also would go to work sometimes. The wife was 45. She did the cleaning and husked paddy in the landlord's house. The remuneration for that was some rice water in the morning with a little rice floating in it. Besides the boy, there were three younger girls, aged 15 years, 12 years and eight months. These were the survivors of a dozen children that the poor women had borne. The rich and fat man has no children. He prays a lot, rolls blindfold in the temple, takes medicines. Still there are many rich families with no children. Our farmer multiplies skeletons generously. He regularly does such work entrusted to him by God. In the matter of reproduction at least, the world will not fail to honour him.

Unfortunately, the eldest girl was quite good-looking. Her father was sad that he might even have to leave his miserable shack on account of that. The landlord's sons used to cast glances at her. The little girl was looked after by her elder sister. She was not going to school. But the landlord's nephew

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Krishnan, the schoolmaster, used to say that she was studying in third class and had been promoted the previous year. Out of fear for the landlord the good Krishnan would give her a borrowed slate and book on the day the landlord was around. At the end of the inspection, Krishnan would give her two annas for tea and she used to accept that gladly.

The rice water obtained in the morning from the landlord's house would be added to the bits of rice left over from the previous night's meal made up the morning meal, together with a curry of salt and chillies. The peasant then toiled until evening, with a drink of water for lunch. He returned to the hut in the evening, worn out by the day's work. As though protesting against feudalism, the mother's downcast breast would not yield a drop of milk, no matter how hard the child pulled and bit it. How could milk come? It had all been squeezed out by the ravages of feudalism. The child satisfied itself with a smile at her father and a little lick at the drops of salty sweat hardened by the day's toil in the hot sun.

What alternative did the peasant have to penury and indebtedness. The entire family had to be clothed. At least one set of clothes had to be bought for each member. Land rent had to be paid. Periodical gifts to the landlord were necessary; the children would have to be married one day; his wife's confinement had to be provided for; money was needed also for occasional visits to the tavern. At night, he would fill half his belly. After that he sang folk songs aloud. It was indeed a great relief as he was able to drown all his cares in the song.

There was a provision store in the locality. The shopkeeper was called Assanar. He opened the shop with 50 rupees,

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but then acquired 500 rupees of stock. He had invested only 50 rupees. He had joined two *chit funds*. For one anna worth of tobacco, he would make a profit of eight annas. Some goods that he had stocked during the First World War were still there. Half of the peasants' wages went into his pocket. If a peasant bought on credit, the prices charged were eight-fold.

I set about enquiring about many such families and getting to know the stories of their misery.

These stories were very painful to me. One day I talked to my grandmother about these poor peasants. She said that they had all turned very impertinent now whereas during the time of their forefathers even crow's were afraid to fly. She told me a story about the days of our family's supremacy:

There was a poor peasant called Kannan. Some land belonging to our family had been entrusted to him for farming. He had a house of his own and some fruit trees. An obedient peasant, he would turn in the rent regularly whether the harvest was good or bad. He used to go to catch fish daily. He had his own net and other fishing accessories. Any good fish that he caught would be turned over to the landlord. Anything of value that chanced to come into the hands of the peasant was for the landlord. One document or the other would state that any big jack-fruit on the northern branch of the jack-fruit tree standing on the south-northern side of the peasant's house should be given to the landlord. If the peasant happens to be a hunter, a large share of the flesh of any deer and rabbits caught by him has to be gifted to the landlord. Our Kannan caught a large crab one day. His children pulled out one of its legs and cooked and ate it. Kannan was worried. He knew the consequences of delivering the crab in this manner to the landlord

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and of not delivering it at all. He approached the landlord in great fear. The landlord was angry. He decided to punish him for slighting him. He was locked up in a room and fumigated. The poor peasant started wailing. He cried out that he would surrender all his valuables.

The peasant was spared his life after all his property was surrendered in writing. This happened 150 years ago. But I realised that the landlord was living on wealth amassed in this manner by fumigating and expropriating poor people like this peasant. This story troubled me much. I saw that the peasants might be made to avenge themselves for these injustices and oppression by organising them in a struggle to regain their wealth expropriated in this manner by landlords and to return them on the just basis of *land to the tiller*. This was one of the factors that soon led me towards socialism and the peasant movement.

My mind was filled with pictures of the dire misery of poor peasants. Many of these have never been effaced.

I was certain that workers and peasants were the two sections of society which were the most willing to undergo sufferings. They had nothing to lose. They possessed nothing except the bodies with which they toiled. They would not lose anything by going to jail. They would see in jail life a chance to eat thrice a day without much effort. Of all people, only this class had the stamina and motivation necessary for the leadership of the freedom struggle and to undergo the attendant sufferings. As it was, they suffered atrocities from capitalists and feudal landlords. There was no doubt in my mind that freedom would be impossible without these people

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in the forefront of the struggle.

They would of course have to be inspired with confidence and taught why and how the struggle should be conducted. In the course of it, their primary demands would have to be fought for, with us in the vanguard. We would have to teach them from experience that this struggle was only a part of the fight for freedom yet integral to it. Only then would the Independence movement become strong, socialism be ushered in and imperialism uprooted.

They could not understand the conflict and alliance between foreign and Indian capitalists. Indian capitalists and progressive landlords took part in and sympathised with the freedom movement. Birla helped the 1930-34 struggle financially. In Kerala capitalists like Samuel Aron have even undergone imprisonment. But they did not concede the just demands of workers. Even trade union rights were denied. These native-born capitalists were united in repressing workers. Peasants and workers felt that they wanted to drive out the whites only to capture power and achieve freedom to repress workers all the more. They thought that success of the struggle would mean greater oppression and hardship. How then could one expect them to think that India's first enemy was the foreign ruler?

Following up this line of thought, the progressives in the Congress met in Patna in 1934. A group calling itself the Congress Socialist Party was formed. Its aim was to strengthen the Congress by organising the vast peasant-worker class and bringing it into the freedom struggle.

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A branch of the Socialist Party was formed in Kerala too. A meeting of Kerala nationalists who participated in the freedom struggle was organised in Thozhilali's office; Kelappan presided. Comrade Krishna Pillai explained the party objectives. C. K. Govindan Nair was elected Secretary. He was to become the Party's greatest enemy as the Party grew and self-interest did not find a place in it.

We, the young, were imbued with a new enthusiasm and inspiration. We felt as though we had acquired a new weapon. We were eager to use it as soon as possible. We earnestly wanted to organise peasants and workers; our faith in class-war was growing.

Class-war has existed ever since the existence of conflict between workers and capitalists. The worker acquired his class-sense as a result of class-war. Only class-war can create a classless society. As long as exploiting classes remain, conflict of interests will exist. And class hatred will subsist as long as conflicting interests are in being. Kindly cliches, sporadic charity or sermons on Vedanta philosophy cannot bring this to an end. We started working among the people with a firm belief in this. The Congress Socialist Party provided us with a new ideology and programme.

It was at this time that I met Comrade E. M. S. Namboodiripad, who was later on to become a leader of the Kerala Congress Socialist Party. I felt as though I was moving from Kelappan's leadership to that of E. M. S. Namboodiripad. I am not at all sorry if people feel that I am a blind follower of Comrade EMS I learned much from him. The strength of the bonds that unite me to him stems from the realisation that he

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has so completely understood my character, my strength and weakness. A good leader should be able to understand his followers. Failure to do this has so often resulted in disastrous consequences. He always assigned me tasks best suited to my abilities and taught me Marxism through these. I felt at this time that Comrade EMS was perhaps too good a man. He could not gauge fully the treacheries of the world. He had had no occasion to mingle with people with subtly evil motives and to live with them. Therefore, he may have occasionally made mistakes. Anyway, I have implicit faith in the strength of his political leadership and the purity of his character. This will remain my opinion until experience proves otherwise.

A meeting of the Congress workers of Kerala was held at the end of 1934 to resume Congress work there. A committee was appointed at that meeting to direct Congress work. I was elected Secretary of this *ad hoc* committee. The late Kunjissankara Menon was one of the other secretaries. Most of the actual work was done by me, but Kunjissankara Menon helped a great deal with advice. Although a great enemy of socialism, he was a sincere and guileless nationalist. I was happy to work with him. One of the nice things about him was that he always welcomed opposition with a smile.

With the failure of civil disobedience, there was a general lull in the country. The Congress had no assets except a table, a chair and an almirah in a corner of the *Mathrubhoomi* office. I felt it would be impossible to resuscitate the Congress in the circumstances. There were no funds even to print membership books. The books were printed through the kindness of the *Mathrubhoomi* manager Krishnan Nair.

There was no money to distribute them. Some money was raised by enlisting a few members of the *Mathrubhoomi* staff and some workers there as members. The books were sent out. I toured the whole of Malabar to enlist new members to the Congress and to form *ad hoc* committees. I found that the people had a new interest. Comrade Krishna Pillai and I toured Cochin and Travancore to enlist new members. There was not much of a response from the princely states. Some newspapers in Travancore even opposed people joining the Congress. They resented the Congress policy in regard to the princely states. Small public meetings were held in Trivandrum, Neyyattinkara and other places. It was at this time that I met Comrade N. C. Shekhar. Members of the Youth League held that the Congress was a capitalist organisation and it was useless to join it. They raised some critical questions during the meeting. We replied convincingly. We were able to recruit some members with the help of K. A. Damodara Menon. But we learnt while in Trivandrum of a government communique prohibiting the Congress from enlisting members. I was also able to familiarise myself with Cochin and Travancore and study the particular problems there.

We were able to recruit more members than in previous years. We won over a section of the workers and many peasants, and realised that this was a result of our work among peasants and workers. It was clear that the programmes of the Congress Socialist Party were attracting these sections of society. This inspired us to redouble our efforts.

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The activities of the Socialist Party were naturally concentrated at first on workers. The working class movement in Malabar as a whole started in January 1935. Some worker associations had been started in Malabar before. The Weaving Workers Union of Azheekode, some company unions in Feroke under the Devadar Malabar Reconstruction Trust initiative and the Travancore Labour Association of coir factory workers in Alleppey were functioning. There were also strikes at the Commonwealth Company at Calicut and Cannanore, the Sitaram Mill at Trichur and the A. D. Cotton Mill of Quilon. But in the absence of a proper revolutionary programme these strikes and unions did not grow into a working class movement.

At first, we set up a union called Calicut Workers Union. There were many types of workers in this—weavers, soap workers and tailoring workers. There is no doubt that this union provided effective leadership to the trade unions and the strikes that were to follow. The names of Comrades Krishnan Nair, Kunjiraman Nambiar, Gilbert, Vaidyar, Choyikutty and Abdulla deserve special mention here. They played a

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prominent role in the strikes at Tiruvannore and Feroke.

I was able to function among workers, to live with them and to learn much from them. I was trained in the practical application of Marxism by Manari Appu, Manayikodan and Abdulla and later on by Mullikodan Raman and Pattaran Chandu. Its first exercise was the cotton mill workers strike. I was able to learn a good deal from the struggles of peasants and workers. It was these lessons that later made me a dedicated Marxist.

New Unions began to appear after the struggle against wage reduction of 1935. A law reducing working hours from 60 to 54 per week was introduced. To frustrate the law, capitalists decided to get 54 hours work completed in five and a half days, thus cutting off half a day's wage from the pay packets of day-rated workers. The workers of Tiruvannore and Feroke were the first to oppose this. The workers of Kerala have a special characteristic. A large section of them are from the outcaste communities. Not only economically, but even socially they were oppressed. Community leaders campaigned so vigorously that the Congress struggle was in reality a struggle for the maintenance of caste Hindu domination. To join such a struggle would be to ruin their future. They proclaimed that their future lay in the continuation of British rule. The Congress was unable to remove this distrust. Workers of this section of society hated even to glance at a Congressman. It was very difficult in these circumstances to organise them.

Comrade Krishna Pillai and I had many fascinating experiences when we went to form the union at the cotton mill at

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Calicut. We would stand outside the gate when workers came out of the factory. They would stare at our *khadi* clothes and walk away in disgust. A small group of workers started laughing at us. They were afraid even to come near us. Comrade Krishna Pillai would approach some with a smile and talk to them. I tried to talk to some myself. Finally, some enlightened workers agreed to call a meeting. A meeting was held one day after working hours. Only 15 people attended. But we were not disappointed. I listened to Manari Appu, who attended the meeting, talking to another worker that evening.

Their conversational exchange was as follows:

Manari: *Why Velayudhan, why didn't you attend today's meeting?*

Velayudhan: *I am not mad like you. I will not fall into the net of Congressmen. Sure.*

Manari: *Is it madness to go for meetings? Can't one just listen to what they say?*

Velayudhan: *I know well who they are and what they will say. Are they not khadi-clad Congressmen? They fought against the government; stoned a mountain. They were dealt with by policemen. They didn't get anything. Baring their teeth in defeat, they have now come to entice us. You can't get Velayudhan for such things. Sure.*

Manari: *This is what comes from not attending the meeting. They only asked us to start a union. They didn't say anything about the Congress.*

Velayudhan: *Are they not clever people? After some time, they will ask us to don khaddar, join the Congress*

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and get beaten. One is sure to get blows if one joins them. Can't you see the police are moving with them? I can't take blows. I will lose even what I get now.

Manari: If we have a union, is it not good for us? Are they not speaking for our good? You need not join the union if you don't wish to. But what is the harm in attending the meeting?

Velayudhan: They are clever. They have nothing else to do. In the name of the union, they want to get some money for tiffin. People like you are helping them in this. You can't get Velayudhan. Sure. They should be driven out.

Manari: We should be getting more wages. Is not the owner harassing us? If we have a union, will that be possible? Velayudhan does not consider these. Why?

Velayudhan: We live only because that good owner started a company. They will undo that also. None of them can help us. God alone should try. How can they change destiny? This is our destiny. Did not God create them as capitalists and us as workers?

This exchange of words provided me with a topic for the next day's speech. I understood the mental make-up of the workers. Velayudhan listened to the proceedings of the next day's meeting from a distance. That meeting woke them up. They realised that we were a new kind of Congress and that we could appreciate the miseries of workers.

The attendance at meetings grew thereafter. We also started studying the company's financial position. We quoted company figures and showed how much profit the owner was getting, and circulating summary notices. We spoke about

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the workers' difficulties and urgent needs. Within a month, a union was started. About 75 percent of the workers joined it. We opened an office. Workers started coming to the office in the morning and evening and reading newspapers. A small section of the workers developed class consciousness and union consciousness. They realised that they would not win their immediate demands without organisational strength. They became keen to strike, and soon decided to strike for better wages and union rights.

On February 19, 1935, cotton mill workers struck work. This created a great stir among workers. All sections of workers joined the strike. The owner's attempt to bring in new workers was also foiled. The people supported this strike. Meetings were held daily. We spoke about the need for popular support to the workers. The owner approached the Government. As the strike was peaceful, the authorities could not interfere.

On the first day of the strike, the police took me and some other organisers of the strike to the police station. The workers were intimidated and I was cautioned. Capitalists planned to join together. But when they found that the strike could not be defeated, they agreed to increase the wage at the rate of one anna per rupee and also offered some other relief. The strike was withdrawn. This created an unprecedented stir among workers. The saw-mill workers of Kallayi gave notice of a strike if their demands were not met before a stipulated date. As the owners conceded some of the demands, they did not have to strike.

During the cotton mill strike, my daily routine was some-

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thing like this. I rose at 4 in the morning, drew up a list of volunteers to picket each section of the mill and despatched them. I would then depute some persons to meet those going to work and to talk to them and prevent them from working. Special squads supervised all this. After that, until 12 noon, I visited the residential blocks of workers. I talked to workers in each block. I would talk about the working class movement on the basis of experiences of the strike. I then gauged the position in each ward. After that until 4pm I would be in the wards. In the evening, a public meeting was held and after that meetings with new arrivals at the factory and conversation with families affected by the strike. I spent four or five hours for fund collection too. At 2am the strike committee met and framed the next day's programme.

I used to visit the Cumbrian compound daily. Many women workers lived there. It was there that lies against the strike were spread. They clustered around and related noisily the lies and rumours they had heard. My replies would keep them reassured until the next day's visit. I had to work tirelessly like this. I became familiar with each family, with people generally and with new places.

The workers learnt many things from this strike. They learnt the strength of a union. The owner had money, hirelings and the support of the Government. Even then, he could not exist without the workers' help. They realised that their life did not depend on the owner's kindness, but that the owner was living on the fruits of the workers' labour. Capitalism existed only through the help of officialdom. If there were no police to repress, beat and imprison workers,

the owner could not but agree to the demands of his workers. They realised that bureaucracy was their greatest enemy. They found that Pootheri Nair, Director Namboodiri, Narakasseri Krishnan and Imbichikoya were all united against the strike. They found that there were only two classes in the world— the proletariat and the capitalist, the rich and the poor, the employer and the employed, the tiller of the soil and the landlord. They learned that organised struggle could subjugate capitalism. They prepared themselves to strengthen the union and to wage another struggle if necessary.

That was the first strike in which I participated. I got an opportunity to live and work among workers. To eat their diet, to speak their dialect, to understand and share their miseries, to lead the struggle against these miseries—I could do all this. Their initial distrust vanished. They realised that I was really their man. That I found their meal of fish and stinking market rice more palatable than a meal of seasoned rice, *sambhar* and other delicacies. Resting on torn mats with one's head supported by one's own knuckles was more comfortable to me than eiderdown mattresses and pillows. Hunger became my inseparable friend. The days when I did not endure it were few and far between. I did not find it difficult because I was their *Gopalettan*. Women workers regarded me as their son and brother. The light of class consciousness and union consciousness was spreading even among women.

We did not know how to conduct a strike. We did not try to spread political and class consciousness through the strike. We could not coach the leaders of workers. A strike's success

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is not to be measured merely in terms of its material gains. We could not convince them that it was still an achievement that all workers could be mobilised in the struggle against capitalism. The strike was kept alive by doling out rice. We could not create in the workers a readiness to sacrifice everything in the struggle for their own class. But we could and did learn all that after the strike began. I learnt all the things a worker for the toiling classes must know. The conditions of the workers and the company, the condition of the industry, the figures showing how the company owners exploit workers—a person who has not studied all these cannot mobilise workers. On every issue that comes up, the opinion of each section of workers must be assessed and one must talk to them accordingly. They believe in destiny and fate. A regular battle must be fought against this. But this must be done carefully and tactfully.

One must instill confidence in one's colleagues. A leader should live as one of them. He should play with the workers children. He should tell stories to their grannies. They should accept him as a member of their household. He should get to know each worker's family. The workers will be prepared to listen to leaders once they have confidence in them. They will keep relating stories of the hardships and hunger suffered by the leaders on their behalf. The boat workers of Calicut went on strike. The workers had come to the Union office the previous day and informed us of their intention. Under instructions from the party, I went and spoke to them. I went to sleep along with them in the Union office. I could not sleep. I was thinking about the next day's programme. After some

time, a man of about fifty came there. He was their leader. I heard him say: *Alas, our friend is sleeping on this dirty mat. The rascals sleeping nearby will roll their legs over him in sleep. Abdulla and Sulaiman sit on either side of him. See that the others do not annoy him while he sleeps.* It was a better mat than the one we had at the Union office. It was a most comfortable sleep for me. But they thought otherwise. I was deeply touched by the aged comrade's words. How kind they are to those who suffer for them. I got up quickly and put him at ease. I asked the two standing guard to go to sleep. The next day I participated in their struggle.

How many experiences like this have I had. One who does not win the confidence and love of the masses cannot become a good party worker. And that is no easy task. Good tactics may be necessary. Wherever it is, Muslim workers particularly and others generally will invite you for tea; after that, they will offer you a *beedi*. They think a worker who has refused these is not their man. If we excuse ourselves saying that we don't smoke they are unlikely to be convinced. We must strive to understand fully the good and the bad points of their lives. This should be accepted initially. After that, if the bad elements are pointed out, they will genuinely attempt to rectify them. How many old comrades have stopped drinking. They are prepared to do anything wanted by union workers. The basis for this is their belief that they are their best allies. An organiser who provides leadership sitting in an office cannot mobilise workers. This is true of peasants too.

Workers were then very frightened of police authorities and revenue officials. A worker who had no personal experi-

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ence of an agitation would be particularly afraid. I was going to the cotton mill at the time of the first strike there. I found Comrade Manari Appu standing near a policeman close to the mill. He was afraid even to talk to me. The policeman said Appu was under arrest. He did not reply when asked for the warrant. I took hold of Appu's hand and walked away. I told the police of the consequence of such conduct. Appu was relieved. After that Appu was never again scared of the police.

The condition of the peasants was even more pitiable. They believed that a Head Constable was superior to even the Viceroy. A peasant once asked me: *It seems some **supre-dentan** or somebody is arriving tomorrow. Is he bigger than our Narayanan Nair Constable?* The peon comes to collect tax and to serve summons. The people think the peon coming to serve summons is superior even to the *tahsildar*. It is difficult to convince them that this is not so.

The persecution carried out in the interior by police officials from Inspectors down to Constables was terrible. A public meeting was held once at Kurumathoor near Taliparamba. Three CID policemen arrived. A crowd three times the strength of those at the meeting was waiting nearby. I could figure out the reason. I started attacking the police strongly. One policeman left. Others were visibly affected. The people standing aside starting coming boldly. They were happy. At the end of the meeting, a group of people told the organisers: *There should be one more meeting. See, how the police were crest-fallen. They used to bare their teeth at us. Good. A brave man.* It could be seen from this how much the common

man feared the police.

I have not made a single speech so far in which I have not attacked officials. It is not on account of any personal animosity against them, but only to line up the people against their persecutors. I can say with pride that this has put a brake on the powers and threats of officials, the agents of imperialism, and has mobilised peasants and workers against that power.

The repercussions of the cotton mill strike were felt in Feroke too. A union called Tile Factory Workers Union had been formed at this time in Feroke. They helped the cotton mill strike and participated actively in it. The success of the cotton mill strike stirred up these workers. They decided that they should strike for their demands and made preparations to this end.

The first attempt to repress the organised struggle of the workers was made at the Malabar Tile Factory. Dismissal of workers for joining in processions, checkmating proposed sites of meetings, buying up such locations, sending ruffians to break up meetings, blocking proposed sites of Union offices—these were their tactics.

Comrade K. P. Gopalan fasted for ten days outside the company gate in protest against these actions. This created a big stir among workers of Feroke.

A large meeting was held near the Feroke bridge. A mammoth procession of 6,000 workers which stirred the entire populace was held. A decision to strike was taken at the meeting.

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 IPC were issued

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even before the strike began. Meetings were banned in the vicinity of Feroke and party workers were ordered not to speak. Nevertheless, the strike continued in strength. The owners joined together and conducted counter propaganda. The workers were intimidated. The Government intensified their persecution. But still the brave workers of Feroke continued their strike. When the strike was found invincible, attempts were made to stone meetings and to incite Hindu-Muslim feuds.

The Manager of the Kerala Tile Company, Ullatu Choyi, supported this strike. It may be true that he backed the strike, not out of love for workers, but because of his personal animosity to Pootheri. The workers of his own factory were not much better off than those of other factories. Anyway, it was a fact that he helped the striking workers many times and showed sympathy in a variety of ways. Just as there is rivalry between workers and owners, there is rivalry between owners themselves. It may be that in this rivalry, a section of owners may support workers. The workers must exploit such opportunities to the utmost. We did that. However, if the workers are not sufficiently class conscious, such owners will become their *close allies* and exploit them all the more. We experienced this too.

There was a large public meeting one day at the Cheruvannoor street corner. Comrade K. Damodaran spoke. There was no prohibitory order against this comrade. When the meeting was going on, a Muslim capitalist of the locality, Janab Imbichimamad, came there with some Muslims. They had been brought from Eranad on cash payment to break up

the meeting. An old Mullakka (Maulvi) was there as speaker. The Mullakka wanted to speak on behalf of the employers. We agreed. A stone fell near him while he was speaking. The ruffians said somebody had stoned the Mullakka and A. K. Gopalan was the one. I had remained close to the Mullakka. The meeting was in confusion. The ruffians spread out in search of me. Fellow-workers extricated me from the crowd and led me to a shop. A posse of reserve police arrived in the meantime. Ruffians invaded the Union office. They hauled down the name-board, destroyed files and struck Keraleeyan. Subsequently they went out in search of me. A reward of 1,000 rupees for my head and all expenses for the defence had been announced already by the owner. A criminal case was launched against me the next day for having stoned and injured a Muslim. The case was dismissed by the court.

Terrible repression from the capitalists on one side and from the government on the other followed. No freedom to hold meetings; starving workers; the majority of workers still deficient in class and union consciousness. Such was the position. For some days rice was doled out to the workers. It was not possible to do that for long. The strike thus failed.

I became acquainted with worker families of Kolathara, Naduvattam, Mannoor, Meenchantha and other localities. I starved with them. At night I fished along with them in the river and cooked and ate the catch. After the strike there was a lull.

Kolathara was my rest camp during the Feroke strike. This was a resort of teachers, the educated unemployed and of working and middle class youth. Although aged, Comrade

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Kunjunni had suffered a lot for the working class movement in Feroke. He was a revolutionary in thought and action. He spent all his earnings from his *chudi* (bangle) business on paying the rent of the Union office and for such other purposes. He had great loyalty towards the working class. I camped mostly with Comrade Perachuttiyettan. He was everyone's friend. His house was a Party house. He watched everything from a distance and sometimes expressed his opinion; when he did this it would be hard hitting. He would criticise anyone without fear. A young man of restraint, maturity, discrimination and fineness of character. An unforgettable figure for the workers of Feroke. The late Choyikutty Vaidyar was my associate. Some important areas in Kolathara, Naduvattam and Berpur were the arteries of the strike.

The late Comrade Sivadasan, Sankaran Nair who was a retired Congress activist, Pillai, some tea-shop owners and cloth dealers all gave their unstinted support to the strike. It was led by workers like Sankaran, Krishnan, Velayudhan, Nayadikutty and others. The venue of the meetings was the familiar clearing near the tree at Cheruvannoor.

There were signs of another strike at the cotton mill. The Government and capitalists jointly planned to force the workers to strike once again and thus destroy their union consciousness and morale. They started breaking the terms of settlement of the first strike. Manari Appu was dismissed on the ground that he had spoken at the Kallai meeting. The workers had no hesitation in striking work.

This strike lasted about 40 days. New workers were recruited. The police camped right inside the company

premises. The owners joined together. In spite of great help from the people, the strike was a failure. It was prolonged a great deal by an effort to split the workers. The owners also decided to demoralise the workers. They sensed the weak points of the strike. It finally collapsed. Some workers were dismissed. It was during this strike that Comrade N. C. Sekhar arrived on the scene.

Comrades Dange, Sundarayya and others visited Kerala during this strike. We were able to get acquainted with them and understand the follies of the strike. I fully understood the mistakes made by us. I had bestowed more attention on the economic than on the political aspects of the strike. I realised the danger and utter folly of keeping a strike going through doles of rice.

There was great mass backing behind this strike. A theatrical performance was staged to collect funds about a week prior to the collapse of the strike. There were no tickets for admission, but we collected small change from the people. 15,000 people attended the drama. There was not enough room. When the people milled about, I asked them to keep quiet if they were on the side of the workers. All sat down quietly. A Muslim merchant told me the next day: *The strength of the union people is really remarkable. Although 15,000 people gathered there was complete silence. There is confusion here even if 10 people gather. If workers join together, nothing can stop them.* In spite of this vast mass support, the strike was a failure. The reason was that one by one workers tried to go back to work as the strike was prolonged. Although a failure economically, the strike was a success politically.

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It was at this time that the foundations of the peasant movement in Kerala were laid. It had been nurtured with the blood of the comrades of Kayyoor. Party workers of Chirakkal, Kasaragod and other *taluks* approached the peasants and held public meetings. Kalliasseri—the birth place of K. P. R. Gopalan— became a centre of the youth movement and reading room. The Shri Harshan Memorial Reading Room became the nucleus of a whole chain of reading rooms in the neighbourhood. Through football games, competitions, reading rooms and youth associations, cadres to work among peasants were created.

The movement grew under the leadership of K. P. R. and with the help of comrades like E. K. Nayanar, E. N. Nayanar, P. Kumaran Master and K. V. Narayanan Nambiar alias Kutty Master. The future peasant struggles were to be led by young men coming from this movement.

A youth league under the leadership of Comrade K. P. Gopalan had been formed earlier in Chirakkal taluk. I was a member of the executive committee of this youth league. It helped a lot in awakening the youth of Chirakkal taluk.

A New India Yuvak Sangham of Karivellore stirred the whole of Kasaragod taluk. Both middle class people and young peasants were in this Sangham. Its leaders were A. V. Kunjambu, V. V. Kunjambu and others. K. Krishnan Master, P. Kunjiraman and many other comrades blossomed through this Sangham. It was able to create Bolshevik heroes like the Kayyoor Comrades. It developed a well-oriented programme, nurtured trained volunteers, and a leadership that adapted its programmes to the needs of the people. A large section of

the leaders of the Sangham at Kasaragod and Chirakkal were members of the New India Youth Association.

Comrade A. V. Kunjambu was a party leader who rose from the ranks of ordinary peasants. He was a gifted organiser and orator. He was the foremost of those who laid the cornerstone of the peasant movement in Kasaragod taluk.

Party leaders of Chirakkal taluk contacted peasants and familiarised themselves with their problems. Keralaleeyan became the peasants' man. Peasants were strongly attracted by Bharatheeyan's ash marks, Bhagavatham and hymns. Kalyasseri and Parassinikadavu became centres of activity.

In the meantime, the Congress too became active in Kerala. The influence and strength of the Congress Socialist Party greatly helped the Congress in converting itself into a mass movement. Those Congressmen who were not socialists busied themselves with plans to question and attack the socialist viewpoint. One found in them fear and sorrow over the growth of the Socialist Party rather than happiness over the Congress gaining strength. They argued that it was not necessary to organise workers and peasants separately. As the Congress represented the entire people of India, it was enough if all joined the Congress. They also said that socialism was against *ahimsa*. They detested the Red flag. They vehemently declared that the heads of landlords would be struck with the hammer and their necks cut out with the sickle. They spread the word that socialists were only creating discord and chaos in the country. They were of the opinion that students should have no say in politics, and said so.

Congressmen did say later on that a separate organisation

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was necessary for workers and peasants and that students should participate actively in politics and that *hartals* and strikes should be organised. But this was an after-thought.

It was at this time that Mr. S. A. Brelvi visited Malabar. Earlier, Raman Menon and others resigned from the KPCC Working Committee and kept themselves aloof from socialists. I was elected President of the Kerala Congress. Both as Congress Secretary and later as President, I worked against heavy odds in enrolling new members, strengthening the organisation and forming primary committees. Endless fasting, sleepless nights, 20–30 miles of walking a day, relentless and tireless work—my health was gravely affected by all these. I suffered from an illness that caused me to faint every now and again.

An incident took place while I was Secretary. The Congress had no funds at that time. K. Raman Menon was the then President. Raman Menon has tried much to fashion the Congress in Kerala according to his ideas. He was the unquestioned leader of a section of Congressmen in Kerala. With the birth of the Socialist Party he assumed leadership of the rightist party of Kerala. He was a determined enemy who would speak and act clearly and openly against his adversaries. His organisational and tactical abilities were such as to win the admiration of even his enemies.

I lay in the *Mathrubhoomi* office for two days on a diet of water. On the third day I could not walk or do any work. The district court had been shifted temporarily to the Town Hall. I went there to see Raman Menon. He was busy with court work. I waited outside. When he came out for something, I

asked for one rupee. He replied that the court was not the proper place for this matter. I returned sorrowfully. Kelappan was then the editor of *Mathrubhoomi*. I went to him. Kelappan understood from my face that something had happened. He asked me what the matter was. I burst out weeping. He pressed me to tell him what had happened. I told him. He gave me a rupee. I declined. Immediately he gave me food.

For travel fare one had to depend on others. For travelling to Calicut for KPCC meetings, one would have to wait at the nearest railway station two days in advance. Each train would be checked to see if there was some well-disposed friend going to Calicut. If anyone was located, he would be asked to buy a ticket. On occasion I was compelled to travel without a ticket.

While staying at Calicut, I frequently had to walk in front of Komalavilasam hotel at 10pm I would accost any familiar person visiting the hotel. If asked *What about tea*, I would accept eagerly. Some friends who understood this used to watch out for us while visiting the hotel. To find benefactors like this for tea, meals and fare itself became a problem. I was able to gain the acquaintance of those whom I approached for this purpose and to make them Congress sympathisers. *These fellows behave like beggars*, some Congress lawyers themselves started saying. This was how Congressmen like me who became Communists built up the Congress in the early days. Even greater were the sufferings when the Socialist Party was being set up. Our bedding comprised sheets of the *Mathrubhoomi* newspaper.

Comrades like Krishna Pillai who starved and wandered with me like this without a place to live in, later built up a

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mighty party. A good office building, typewriter, clerks, quarters where members could lodge and board, and a life befitting a human being. It is not surprising therefore that when the party was built up like this after three years of secrecy and privation, those who were unable to understand our methods were convinced that it could not be done without taking bribes from the government. They do not remember that this is a party of numerous revolutionaries who were willing, like Nambudiripad, to undergo untold sacrifice.

The Congress was turning into a mass movement. Congress offices were opened even in villages. Although on a small scale, the Congress interested itself in the day-to-day problems of the people. Thousands of peasants and workers came forward to join the Congress and to attend its meetings. As a result of the activities of the Socialist Party, they were convinced that Congressmen were willing to agitate for their rights. Funds started coming. There was on the whole a new zeal and awakening. The people knew that freedom was an avenue to socialism. Peasants and workers who had once opposed the Congress formed unions and peasant groups and implemented the Congress programme through these organisations. There was a far-reaching change in the people as whole.

Through the experience of strike struggles I could appreciate fully well these words of Stalin in *History of the communist party of the soviet union (Bolsheviks)*:

... the history of the Party teaches us that unless it has wide connection with the masses, unless it constantly strengthens these connections, unless it knows how

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to harken to the voice of the masses and understand their urgent needs, unless it is prepared not only to teach the masses, but to learn from the masses, a party of the working class cannot be a real mass party capable of leading the working class millions and all the labouring people.

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1935–36 was a time of Socialist propaganda work. After the cotton mill and Feroke strikes of 1935, labour unions were set up throughout Kerala. New unions came up. Unions like the Weaving Workers' Union, Beedi Workers' Union and Rickshaw Workers' Union were active throughout the country. Slogans like *Death to landlordism*, *Death to capitalism*, *Death to imperialism* and *Victory to revolution*, were heard everywhere. Capitalists and landlords were scared. The youth were eager to build a new society. A large section of Congressmen started opposing this movement openly. They argued that it was deterring capitalists and landlords who were sympathetic to the Congress from participating in the struggle. They forgot that lakhs of peasants and workers were getting closer to the Congress. This did not enter their calculations. Class war and class consciousness took root amongst the oppressed classes. The middle class was deeply attracted by this movement.

Our slogan *Death to landlordism* was very attractive to peasants who for centuries had groaned under the oppression of landlords. I went to preside over a meeting at Chirakkal taluk. I visited a peasant in his house at the end of the meeting.

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He was a poor peasant in extreme difficulty. He said: *We believe that we will profit by your efforts. We are also doing all we can. We are especially glad to hear the slogan **Death to landlordism**. I wish to die with it ringing in my ears.* Children of peasants and workers started chanting these slogans at nightfall every day. This greatly angered landlords and capitalists.

I once went to Karikattu Idathil Nayannar, a house in Chirakkal taluk, to mediate for peasants. Its owner said, while Nayannar and I were speaking: *Gopalan, I am only sorry for this. Let them hold meetings, speak, let them shout what they want. I have no objection. But when I am out, as soon as they see me, even children living on our land will say **Death to landlordism**. That I cannot suffer. When they are in front of this house, the procession will stop for five minutes and shout 'Death to landlordism'.*

During a procession in Feroke once, workers shouted *death to capitalism* at the top of their voice while in front of Pootheri Kuttykrishnan Nair's house. This naturally angered the capitalist.

A new class consciousness thus manifested itself among peasants and workers. The middle class party workers even altered their way of speaking. They repeated Marxist phrases in and out of place. They started calling the well-dressed and the well-fed *bourgeois*. The youth were attracted by atheism and rationalism.

Using this opportunity Congress leaders tried to conduct propaganda against the Socialist Party. They declared that socialists were against god and religion. They said that in Russia one man's wife was the wife of all and that women were shared there. They argued that socialists were against

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the Congress and *ahimsa*. Even those hostile to the Congress started attacking socialism and the Congress Socialist Party under cover of the Congress name.

I became an 'agitator'. My duties were to deliver speeches at Congress meetings and attend meetings of workers and peasants. I toured the length and breadth of Kerala to speak at such meetings. I took part in struggles against officialdom, feudalism and capitalism. I stirred up the masses to struggle against local oppressions. I could set the people afire by my speeches. I started inventing stories and hymns suited to this. I still remember a poem that I used to recite at public meetings held at that time. It has helped a lot in stirring up the people. These lines were written by K. Ayyappan. I protested against oppression by the police and officials to save the people from further oppression. I was able to erase from the people their childish fear of the police.

I was the chief speaker at a very large public meeting held one day in the interior of Eranad. There were many policemen at the meeting. I spoke strongly against the atrocities of the police. An old Muslim peasant suddenly got up and told the policemen: *Why do you keep quiet? Didn't you hear the speech? You got it back nicely. Are you not tormenting us? It won't be allowed in future.* The policemen were crest-fallen. The people attending the meeting started clapping and shouting.

What was the Congress Socialist Party's line at this time? Instead of being an independent worker party, it was merely a camp-follower of Gandhi-ism and of the capitalist class. It originated not from class struggle, but from national struggle.

Organisationally the Socialist Party was just like the

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Congress. Some leaders and some followers who would do what they were told. Each of the leaders would act according to his fancy. If there was a strike, all would gather there. After that, they would go somewhere else. If there was an agitation among peasants, they would join it. They would thus face struggles on an *ad hoc* basis. No attempt was made to learn from these struggles, or to exchange experiences or to educate others. Education of cadres was simply non-existent. There was no arrangement to train the new workers who emerged from each struggle. Even the party leadership failed to understand this. The party had no well-ordered office. There was no arrangement to give assignments to activists, to check their work, to point out mistakes and to help them to correct mistakes. The party executive committee met a day before the KPCC. meeting. Comrade Krishna Pillai would speak about some temporary activities. Some would sleep. Some others would be busy thinking about how to get funds to return home. Each would go his way. There was no system even of reporting on one's experiences. On the whole, there was organisational chaos everywhere. As the party leaders themselves were not experienced in this line, they managed to get things done sometimes by being very rude, sometimes by getting angry with the party workers and sometimes by just patting them on their backs.

Lenin's words on the Social Democratic Party before it split were quite applicable to the Socialist Party:

Formerly our Party was not a formally organized whole, but only the sum of separate groups, and therefore no other relations except those of ide-

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ological influence were possible between these groups. Now we have become an organised Party, and this implies the establishment of authority, the transformation of the power of ideas into the power of authority, the subordination of lower Party bodies to higher Party bodies.

None knew what the other was doing. For each party unit to meet once a week, express its opinion, discover its mistakes, indulge in self-criticisms and formulate a correct political line— such a programme did not exist at all. It was a loose and disorganised movement that possessed neither political policy nor plan.

This led to the growth of individual domination and personal rivalries. As long as there are classes, there will be class war too. But it is possible to collaborate with other parties on the basis of a common programme and to move forward in the freedom movement. Freedom must come before socialism. To socialism through freedom, a united front was needed. Some party leaders and members had no faith in such a united front. Those who were unable to accept this viewpoint *in toto* were branded as reactionaries. The Congress middle classes were all dismissed as reactionaries. Even dealings with lawyers, doctors and others who no doubt hated socialism but were still Congress leaders, were viewed with suspicion.

Comrade Chandroth and I were working together at this time. Our ties became closer. We worked jointly in the interior of Kottayam taluk. We also had bonds with Congressmen like Dr. T. P. N. Nair and T. K. Narayanan. We did not aim at

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converting them into socialists, but we did want to see if they could be transformed into revolutionary Congressmen.

Our co-workers did not like this. They were suspicious of us. They could not understand why we were not openly attacking Gandhi-ism. They thought we had turned into hirelings of the *bourgeoisie*. They believed that it was impossible even to talk to those with a different political opinion. I have lived and worked with Congress leaders who were enemies of the Socialist Party. This was very difficult. But I think it was still possible. Once when I was eating in the house of a Congress leader and a lawyer, a friend greatly ridiculed the Socialist Party. Everyone except me joined in the ridicule. I felt sad and could hardly restrain the tears of anger that welled up in my eyes. But I kept eating. I left the house talking and laughing with the others. If one is sure of one's own position, I believe it is possible to change even one's enemy's views through association.

Some workers say that I do not speak out openly and that I try to please everyone. This is true to an extent. It is a fact that I never displease anyone unnecessarily. If it is a fault I own up to it. I was forced into such an attitude by responsible public work, and I have frequently found it efficacious. If the question was of merely earning a reputation as being outspoken there would be nothing to it. But our words and actions should aim at creating trust in others and thus make them accept our viewpoint. If this is so, we have to adopt a variety of tactics. So many people have been alienated and many institutions wrecked by the tactlessness of our workers. Just as Bharatheeyan's ashes, sandalwoodpaste and chantings

of the Geetha have helped the growth of the peasant movement, a comrade who argued against God's existence, in the peasant committee was able to wreck the local committee of the place. Especially while working among the middle classes, one had to be very careful. We had to convince our audiences that we shared the same ideals and aspirations as they.

Anyway, our comrades started speaking adversely about us. They cast doubts about our party consciousness and loyalty. This was extremely painful for us.

Comrade C.H was the one who attracted me most among the co-workers I met at this time. He came to socialism via rationalism. As an atheist, some disliked him. He could write and speak well. He had great organisational ability and was a gifted agitator and one who could train up workers. I was able to learn many a thing from him.

A dark chapter in my political life began. Comrade Chandroth and I resigned from the Socialist Party in anger over certain developments. The leadership was incapable at that time of pointing out to us the mistakes in our policy or actions and to correct them. On the other hand, we were not mature enough to take the issues to the leadership instead of resigning in a huff; to argue it out before them and to set the matter aright. We were angered and pained when our loyalty to the working class that we had served for such a long time was questioned by our co-workers and our idealism doubted. But resignation was not the answer. I was to learn later from experience that by resigning we had only fallen into the trap of party enemies and unwittingly furthered anti-party activities. My political education was the result not of doctrine

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but experience. It was because of this that I make mistakes initially and was able to correct them later.

Chandroth and I found that it was a mistake after all to have resigned. Anyway, we decided to rejoin the party. But it was no use. So lacking in political maturity were some of my co-workers.

I decided to refrain from mutual in-fighting and scandal-mongering and to implement the party programme. There was a minor split in the party. We felt that a new movement was necessary to prevent exploitation of the split by enemies of the party and to prevent intensification of the split through virulent discussions in party ranks. We had at least that much party solidarity.

The crying problems of the day were hunger and unemployment. Many graduates coming out of universities annually were languishing for want of employment. Useless to home and country, they were a burden unto themselves and lived in despair and educated hunger. This was also the life of the poor in villages.

There were many starving people—men as well as women—in all large towns. But nobody had the courage to admit that he was starving. The educated youth especially would not own it. They behaved as though they were starving through some fault of theirs. They did not understand that the blame for hunger lay at the door of the inequitable social structure. And, they did not realise that their duty lay in joining the struggle to uproot that structure.

A friend of mine and a graduate spoke to me about his pitiable condition. He belonged to a small peasant family. All

their property were sold to meet the expenses of his education. They hoped that he would become a *munsiff* or magistrate after leaving college. His father and mother were very pleased with him. They used to yearn for the day when he would return home for vacation. He passed the examination in the first rank. He wandered about for a year in search of a job. He knocked at the gates of all offices. The scriptural adage *Knock and it shall be opened* proved illusory in his case. He finally became a burden to his home. They began to hate him and started saying openly that they wanted him to go away. Many BA's and School Certificate holders like this were attracted towards our movement. But they were not willing to hold the flag and say aloud *Let Hunger Be Damned*. False prestige did not allow them to do that. But they were waiting and hoping for the success of our movement. Committees of the unemployed were formed. Such committees were formed in Kathiroom and other places. We decided to send a hunger procession to the Tellicherry Divisional Officer.

Everyone was attracted by this new move. Party workers started co-operating with us in this movement. Public meetings were held for propaganda. A *jatha* finally left Koothuparambu to see the Collector.

A group started from Kalyasseri under Comrade KPR's leadership. They reached Koothuparambu on foot. The *jatha* left Koothuparambu with about a thousand people and it was substantially bigger by the time it reached Tellicherry.

The Deputy Collector received our *jatha* and talked to us, its representatives. A large police force had been kept ready. He said he would do whatever he could, but as the matter

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concerned the government, he would have to write to them.

A public meeting was held afterwards at the beach. We announced at this meeting that a *jatha* would proceed to Madras on foot the following day. We requested the people to render all possible help to it. This decision was taken on the spur of the moment after seeing the enthusiasm of the people. We had not bothered to carefully consider the difficulties.

The very fact of going to Madras on foot created enthusiasm among the people. Whatever their object, Congress leaders helped greatly and the *Mathrubhoomi* newspaper provided adequate publicity.

We conducted a propaganda campaign about the *jatha* throughout North Malabar. Many people offered to join us as volunteers. The *jatha* finally started from Cannanore.

Many young people came forward. They hoped for a solution to the problem of unemployment as a result of the *jatha*. Some others were sure that it would be of no use at all. The purpose of the *jatha* was to educate the people on the reasons for hunger and starvation and on what should be done to eradicate these scourges. In other words, it was a new kind of propaganda for socialism. The Government realised this only too well. A large police force accompanied us, also on foot. From each place, a new group of policemen would join us. It was almost as though a police *jatha* was following us.

New hymns were composed. Comrade KPR's compositions like *Starvation, starvation, extreme starvation* and *Tax collection season is here with us once again* were very popular. The songs were printed in book form and circulated. 20,000

copies of a pamphlet in Malayalam on the purpose of the hunger march were also printed. It was later printed in Tamil too. P. Gopalan, as our pilot, made special arrangements for us in Tamil Nadu.

I cannot pass on without referring to some of our colleagues in the *jatha*. I was the *jatha* Director. Comrade Chandroth was Secretary. Comrade KPR was in charge of the singers. He was ill and suffered a lot in trying to reach Madras without breaking the *jatha* discipline. Scorching sun. As the comrades got tired, KPR would start singing aloud. Others chanted with gusto and everyone would be active again. Another singer was Comrade M. N. Kunjikannan. A third was Comrade T. K. Raju. The sale of books was under the charge of Comrade K. Chathukutty who was a tireless worker. Another member was Comrade Kelunettan. Although ill, he was extremely energetic. His occasional witsicisms were greatly appreciated. Other members of the *jatha* were Comrades V. M. Gopalan, Vadavathi Krishnan, Pinarayi Krishnan Nair, C. C. Gopi, Kassim, Manuel, Gopalan and others.

Everywhere in Kerala, the *jatha* was warmly welcomed. It was possible to conduct a vigorous propaganda campaign against hunger and unemployment. We realised later that this helped greatly in the elections held soon after. Purses were presented to the *jatha* at various places. Chandroth and I spoke at public meetings. We found a great enthusiasm among the people. We entered Coimbatore from near the Valayar hill. From there we could hear the trumpeting of wild elephants.

We were well received in most places in Tamil Nadu. But Congressmen like Satyamurthy were against this. They ar-

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gued that our real aim was to conduct socialist propaganda. As a result of their propaganda we were received coolly in some places.

We (the Congress and the CSP) were able to conduct a joint propaganda campaign throughout Tamil Nadu. The Party was able to establish a hold on many places as a result. It also gave me the opportunity of meeting the workers of Tamil Nadu.

An old woman burst out in tears at one place. She thought that we had been starving for many days. She said we should eat something and she herself would prepare it. We disabused her of her apprehensions. We camped for two days at Salem. The ovation here was very exhilarating. A Malayalee of Cannanore, Srimathi K. Madhavi, presided. She was a municipal councillor there. About 6,000 people attended the meeting.

I spoke in English at the meeting. By the time I reached Madras I had learnt to speak English. The speech was translated at all the places we visited. Two stenographers of the government were invariably present at all our meetings.

The police force accompanying us increased in number as we entered Tamil Nadu. This exasperated us. We decided to make fun of the police. We planned it that very morning. The volunteers were instructed to scatter on hearing a whistle while marching and to re-gather at the second whistle. When we reached a spot surrounded by a thickly wooded area, the whistle was blown. The police ran helter skelter. One broke his umbrella; another fell down; a third's trousers slipped down. Confusion everywhere. The second whistle was blown and all the volunteers returned. The next day there were still

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With Comrades who went on the Hunger March to Madras

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more policemen.

The *jatha* members were physically exhausted after a month. Some were unable to walk. Minor illnesses had afflicted them one by one. This was not surprising. Some 20 miles had to be covered daily. We would start at 7 o'clock in the morning. At 10 o'clock we would stop to rest. At 2 we re-started from there, reaching our destination at 6 o'clock in the evening. A public meeting there and at 10 o'clock we retired after a meal. The *jatha* members showed commendable patience and perseverance. I was able to invigorate and enthuse them. We carried a bag containing books for sale and our medicines. Each volunteer had a bag containing his personal belongings. When the members got tired, there was no one to carry the common bag. I understood what was wrong and carried it myself for two days. After that, the others also helped with it without murmur.

This emphasises the fact that a person who is unable to undergo the same hardships as his co-workers, if not greater ones, cannot successfully lead a team. As I had realised this even earlier from experience, it was not very difficult for me to lead this movement.

One must not command others, but should be willing to work along with them. Only workers who do this will earn the goodwill of their co-workers. This should be particularly borne in mind in public activities.

In some places Congressmen did not cooperate with us. Workers who had promised to arrange a reception at a place called Vaniyambadi left the station on the day we arrived. We

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stayed in a *choultry* and had meals brought from a hotel. We led a procession round the town and held a meeting on the banks of the river. There was a large gathering. We strongly attacked the un-cooperative attitude of the Congressmen. In some places we cooked our own food.

In many ways this march was a great experience. The accompanying policemen decamped with our clothes on one occasion! In some places the police carried out a counter-propaganda programme.

We finally reached Madras. Our idea was to enter the Madras legislature building. There was a huge reception awaiting us at Madras. 3,000 people came to receive us. A mighty procession! The city had not witnessed such a large procession before. About 200 soldiers rode in formation on horseback. We held a public meeting at Congress House in the evening. This was arranged by the Tamil Nadu Socialist Party.

We marched to the legislative assembly the next day. The police intercepted us. As we did not intend to break the law and go to jail, we returned without entering the Assembly House. We returned home by train from Madras.

We decided to exploit the impact of this *jatha*, not the least significant of the hunger marches of history. We had covered 250 miles on foot, held 500 public meetings at which we spoke to two lakhs of people. 25,000 leaflets were sold and 500 rupees collected in small change. We decided to send small *jathas* to all the *taluks* of Kerala. Many newly enrolled volunteers participated in these *jathas* *Hunger songs* echoed everywhere.

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Bonds for good conduct were demanded of me first and then of Comrades K. P. Gopalan and Keraleeyan. Cases were registered. We were convicted. The government not unnaturally wished to prevent us from participating in the forthcoming legislative assembly elections. I was sentenced to nine months imprisonment and sent to Trichinopoly. This was my fourth term of imprisonment. Although a *class B* prisoner, I suffered greatly this time. Solitary confinement for the entire term of eight months. I was confined in a mini-jail inside the jail proper. This mini-jail had its own walls. There was nobody there except the warden and myself. I suffered a lot, and waged a long struggle with the jail authorities. This time, I read much and made notes. I was also able to review my past work.

I pondered over my resignation from the Party and its consequences for the Party and myself. I reflected on how far it had been used by Party enemies and how far we ourselves had been responsible. I reflected also on the pitfalls likely to be faced by a party which had no proper political orientation and organisational base. I learned a few things from this. Coming as I did from the middle class I was subject to the class traits of false pride, self-conceit and desire for power. I realised that one can never become a revolutionary unless these traits are completely obliterated from one's character. I felt that the structure of the Socialist Party was not suitable for this. I cast my eyes towards Marxism and towards the Marxist party. I decided to join it.

I was in touch with election news through newspapers. The slogan *Vote in Yellow Box* was heard everywhere. Congress

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propaganda meetings were held all over the country. The Congress won a huge majority in the election and formed a ministry. Raman Menon became the Minister in charge of Jails. The jail authorities. changed their attitude towards me. Eventually I was released a month before my term expired. I felt proud to be released when the Congress was in power. The Party welcomed me. I rejoined it in shame and sorrow over the mistake that I had earlier committed. I decided to work to strengthen the Party in such a manner as to obliterate all traces of this dark chapter in my relations with it.

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With the Congress coming into power, there was general enthusiasm and zeal throughout the country. Even those who had hitherto been enemies of the Congress pretended to be Congressmen. Government officials who had vied with each other in oppressing and suppressing the Congress donned *khaddar*. The attitude of the police also changed. They sometimes even came forward to enquire into complaints by Congress committees.

Although the powers of the Congress executive were limited, it wanted to do something for the people. The Agriculturists Relief Act was passed at this time. Sufficient civil liberty was allowed to the people initially.

Congress activities in Kerala were very intense at the time. Socialists and those sympathetic to Socialism constituted a majority in the Congress Committee. Comrade EMS was elected Congress Secretary. The programme of the Socialists was to bring home to the masses the declared aims of the Congress, implement the decisions of the Congress and to stress the revolutionary aspects of those decisions and to orient Congress activities accordingly.

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The Congress in Kerala started becoming organisationally strong. A properly functioning office, primary committees keeping the lower units well instructed, proper liaison between state and local committees, keeping them supplied with programmes of work from time to time, maintaining proper accounts, keeping records— the Congress had all these at this time. Not only the state committee but even local committees started functioning efficiently. Very many new primary committees were formed. Actually, 500 new primary committees were formed. And these were not merely paper committees. They were committees that really functioned.

What was even more important, a strong volunteer force was also set up. A KPCC training camp was held at Thikkodi. Its Commander was Comrade Chandroth. Camps were also held at Ponnyam, Chowghat, Valluvanad, Calicut and other places. A total of 500 people, including officers, were trained. There were in addition peasant volunteer forces and worker volunteer forces.

The KPCC held a summer school at Mankada Pallipuram. The camp lasted for about a month. 100 students were given instruction. Such a school was unprecedented in the political history of Kerala. Instruction was imparted in history, elementary economics, philosophy and politics. Afterwards, the inmates of the school dispersed to their various places of residence and attended classes there.

The Congress thus became an organised force. Holding political classes, giving training to volunteers, getting the feel of the needs of the people and doing whatever was possible for the people and explaining the programme of activities of the

day through public meetings. The Congress was transformed in this manner into a mass movement. The Congress Socialist Party can deservedly take pride that it was able to strengthen the Congress and turn it into a mass organisation.

To take part in conferences, and in local agitations and peasant campaigns and to assist these—this was my work schedule. My main work was to organise agitations. A mighty awakening against imperialism, official overlordship, feudalist repression from the landed and capitalist intimidation was created among the people. I was able to instruct party workers themselves on how to face the problems of their region and how to conduct agitations. It was usual for me to participate daily either in a Congress meeting or a peasant meeting or a workers' meeting. I think, of all party workers in Kerala, I am the one who has inflicted myself most on the people through speeches! Perhaps it was in retribution for this that I subsequently had to spend many years in solitary confinement in jail without being able even to see the people.

No feudalism or capitalism or bureaucracy can survive against an organised mass struggle. Karakkattidathil Nayanar tried to destroy the peasant movement by intimidation when it was first started. Some of the peasants were scared and others were in disarray. A peasant meeting was held at a place called Ellerinji. The peasants were briefed on the strength of unity. Such knowledge put them into high spirits. Even those who had kept themselves away so far started drawing near to the movement. Nayanar realised this. He offered to mediate. He decided to agree to some of the demands of the peasants and to make peace with them. We had known many

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such experiences in our work. Such achievements were the basis on which we built the peasant-worker movement and the anti-imperialist movement.

While organising this agitation, I was able to come into contact with people in every nook and corner of Kerala, and could sense the tremendous difference between 1932 and 1938, both in participation and enthusiasm.

I went to preside over the Payyannoor political conference. I saw something there that impressed me deeply. The peasants of Kandoth who in 1931 had attacked me and Comrade Keraleeyan arrived for the meeting shouting slogans like *Victory to Congress, Let imperialism be damned and Let landlordism be damned*. I realised how far the Socialist Party had made the common people nationalist-minded. That group did not disperse after the meeting. Some elderly people came forward and started speaking sadly with heads bowed down. *We have realised how bad it was on our part to have beaten you and Keraleeyan who were ready to work and die for us and who are our own. Do not nurture ill-will towards us. Forget and forgive. We have set up a peasant union. We are willing to act according to your instructions.* Some started weeping at this. I too was moved. The Congress was theirs that day; it struggled for them; it strove to improve their very way of life. They felt that they too were Congressmen. I consoled them by saying that it would take some years for the class characteristics of the Congress to be understood. One could not expect it to happen overnight.

Irikkoor in Chirakkal *taluk* is a Muslim centre. Until the birth of the peasant movement, the Muslims there would

never allow Congress meetings to be held. It was they themselves who came forward to hold meetings on this occasion. An incident occurred one day while I was walking from Irikkoor to Iritty. While I was walking up the road, a Muslim trading by the roadside ran up to me and insisted that I spend some time in his shop. He treated me to tea and said, *Because of your activities we can live as human beings now. God will protect you, surely. Normally, 200 rupees have to be paid to the landlord in a year as rent and other dues. Provisions have to be bought on credit. But there is nothing to pay with; so whatever there is in the shop has to be surrendered. Money too has to be borrowed. This year he very rarely comes here. Poor people like me are much relieved. Enroll me in the Congress and Sangham. I shall pay. May Allah protect you.* I replied that he could join after meeting the local workers. The common people trust and respect those who work for the poor and any movement that is beneficial to them. But one must act as one preaches and enunciate a programme of action when one speaks.

To join the Congress became honourable. The people realised the strength of organisation. The notion that British imperialism was indestructible gave way. More and more the people began to think that if they joined together, the police and army couldn't stand in their way. Along with this, 'Sunday Congressmen' and those who had infiltrated into the Congress merely to get jobs also found a place in the Party. Congress candidates were successful in elections to district boards, municipalities and other bodies. The peasants and workers not only voted for Congress but also played a considerable role in election propaganda. K. Kelappan was elected

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President of the Malabar District Board. All the municipalities in Malabar were captured by Congressmen.

Peasants and workers contributed most to the success of Congress candidates in the elections. The peasants had hoped that with the Congress forming a ministry, some of their hardships would be mitigated and legislation would be framed for that purpose. But experience belied their expectations. After a brief period of respite police atrocities continued as before. The so-called punitive police was introduced. Realising or not realising that feudal interests and officialdom were jointly trying to smother the growing mass movement, the Ministry gave more importance to the opinion of officials than to the supplications of the people. The Ministry as a result began to alienate peasants and workers who realised that their disabilities would end only with the strengthening of their own organisation and the establishment of people's rule. *Vote in the yellow box and suffer like this*, the enemies of the Congress taunted.

It was a time of intense rivalry and bad blood between socialist and non-socialist Congressmen. A section of Congressmen were alarmed when they saw the Congress daily gaining in strength, thanks to the Socialist Party and its activities. They feared that the Congress would be captured by Socialists. A committee called the Congress Gandhi Sangham was formed to campaign against this. K. Kelappan was its President and K. A. Damodara Menon Secretary. They campaigned in the name of *ahimsa*. They spread rumours which pilloried socialists. Disturbances were organised to upset Congress elections and ballot boxes were cordoned

off. Notices and leaflets against Socialists were circulated. Congress leaders like Samuel Aron were bold enough to oppose Socialists publicly and boycott KPCC meetings. They did not bother about whether or not the Congress was becoming stronger as a result of the Socialist Party's activities or whether the Congress programme was attractive enough to enlist the people's sympathies for the coming struggle. To oppose anything done by socialists and not to cooperate with them became their obsession. Personal rivalry soon assumed grotesque forms. Even leaders like Kelappan started viewing me with suspicion despite the fact that I had worked as his right hand man in the past. In a statement after retiring as District Board President, he said even those who had worked intimately with him during the temple entry agitation had begun to spread rumours about him.

Finally this coterie of Congressmen started making fun of the United Front. They claimed that the United Front was incapable of functioning. In a word, it was a pocket edition of what happened in 1944. The only thing that they did not say was that we were accepting bribes from the government.

By 1939, the Congress Committee was entirely boycotted. The rightist Congress leaders even tried to field their own candidates and defeat the candidates of the KPCC at the second District Board election. They did not even think of the necessity of mobilising the people for the coming struggles against imperialism, war and federation. Their main concern was not the achievement of freedom but repression of Socialists. Anti-communism that was to blossom in 1944 took root at this time. Instead of collaborating with the newly emerging

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forces in the Congress, the Gandhian Congress leadership was eager to oppose those forces as far as this lay in its power. Instead of organising and strengthening the daily struggles of the people for their immediate demands, they opposed and wrecked those struggles. They failed to see how badly it was affecting the progress of the nationalist movement.

Since 1921, no effective Congress activities had been organised in any part of Eranad *taluk* except Ramanattukara. It was only when the Congress was in power that Congress activity was restarted in Eranad. Political conferences and public meetings, enrollment of Congress members, formation of a peasants' union—I worked in these fields in Eranad *taluk* for about three months along with Congress President, Janab Abdul Rahiman Sahib. This helped bring about a considerable awakening there. On one occasion I was invited to preside at the first public meeting held in Tirurangadi. I arrived late. A crowd larger than any normal audience was waiting some distance away from the site of the meeting. *They are out to bring danger and firing again. This cursed flag is a nuisance. They should be driven away.* This is an example of what they said.

I spoke for four hours. I explained the current position of peasants and what they could gain if they organised themselves to mitigate their hardships. I spoke of the history of the Congress. I dealt with the hardships of Muslim peasants. I strongly attacked official domination. Those who stood apart came near and started listening with interest. When the meeting ended, some aged Muslims approached me and said, *One meeting is not enough, there should be another grand meeting. We shall invite all. Our Abdul Rahiman Sahib should also attend.*

Another grand meeting was held soon after. Our opponents were silenced.

A *jatha* had started out under the leadership of Appakoya and Yusuf with the object of removing Hitchcock's Memorial. It was called the Hitchcock Memorial Removal *Jatha*. I toured various parts of Eranad with this *jatha*, and was thus able to make the acquaintance of our Muslim brothers there. It was at this time that I was able to strengthen my ties with Abdul Rahiman, Moidu Moulvi and others. My association with Abdul Rahiman helped to an extent in turning me into a seasoned agitator.

It was at this time too that the student movement in Kerala came into its own. Young students were conscious of their role in shaping the future social structure and in understanding what was happening around them after the elections. They felt that they should play an active role. Thousands of students were coming out every year from universities with degrees. They were doomed to languish without jobs. The educational system was a tool for the perpetration of slavery. Both the method of instruction and the syllabus were attuned to that. Students were not supposed to study and reflect on the political happenings around them. They had to be content with old-fashioned text-books that taught them irrelevant tales about Clive and others. Such a situation exists even today. In the name of discipline, teachers had the right to thrash students, to send them out of class and to expel them from the university. They were not even allowed to organise themselves to fight for their rights. It was only natural that students too felt the urge for solidarity when they saw peas-

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ants and workers around them coming forward in organised strength and when they saw the Indian National Congress waging struggles against foreign domination.

Students started agitating against unjust suspension and repressive measures like imposition of fines for participating in political agitations. The first student union was set up at the Brennen College, Tellicherry, following an agitation over the expulsion of a student. When I went to Tellicherry one day, some of the Muslim students there met and briefed me. A meeting of students was held that evening at the college campus. The Principal tried to prevent the meeting being held there. As the Chairman of the meeting, I did not pay heed to that order. It was decided to go on strike if the expelled student was not taken back the next day. The students did not pay heed when the bell rang. The matter was settled after a talk with the Principal.

After that, the students strengthened their organisation. An office was opened and a conference scheduled. The conference was held under Comrade Batliwala's presidentship. On a warrant from the Madras Ministry, he was arrested at the end of the conference. I learned later that initially the order was to arrest both me and Batliwala and that this was withdrawn hastily at the insistence of Raman Menon and M. P. Damodaran. This incident led to a stir among students everywhere in Kerala. Campaigning in villages during vacation-time, circulation of manuscript magazines, conducting competitions and summer schools were some of the activities that students were busy with.

Student strikes followed in Badagara and Chirakkal. In

both places, I worked along with students to lead the strikes and later to restore normalcy. There was also an agitation against the fining of a student of Payyannoor school. The student started a hunger strike in front of the school. The peasants of Payyannoor and surrounding areas joined this agitation. The hunger strike was finally abandoned after mediation by the Divisional Officer. I thus worked to provide effective leadership to student agitations erupting all too suddenly and to organise unions on the basis of those agitations and to assist them.

Congress leaders were very angry over these happenings. They began complaining that students were being misled; that they should not participate in politics and that *hartals* and strikes were a cheap imitation of the ways of workers and peasants. *Mathrubhoomi* published editorials in this vein. But consider what happened later. The same Congress leaders who had criticised the activities we had helped the students to organise at this time, later on had the gumption to call on them to organise and participate in *hartals* and strikes. It should be particularly remembered that those who insisted that the red flag should not be displayed changed their attitude later on to allow this symbol of class organisation to fly alongside the national flag.

It was at this juncture that the teachers' movement took on an anti-imperialist stance and developed into a mass organisation that took all teachers of Kerala under its umbrella. It must not be forgotten that elementary school teachers have played a considerable role in Kerala's political history. Not only have they organised themselves, but they have also or-

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ganised peasants and students. It can be stated with pride that the teachers' organisation of Malabar is a model for all Indian teachers' organisations. It was this organisation that freed teachers from the slavery of Managers and education department officials and made them strong enough to speak out for their rights. They conducted *hartals* and agitations throughout Malabar on September 26, 1939. I presided over the first conference of radical teachers held at Pinarayi in 1935. I was thus able to participate in teachers' conferences and study their problems.

I was able at this time to go home for two days rest. Not feeling like idling, I decided to visit some elementary schools in the vicinity. Teachers in most of the schools had been my students. I wrote in the Visitors' Books my assessment of condition of the Schools. I also recorded my opinion that the schools were conducted merely as business concerns. I also wrote an article in *Mathrubhoomi* on these lines under the caption *School Business*. A week later, the Education Director ordered the Deputy Inspector to investigate the matter. The Deputy Inspector met me. The department enquired into the article and reduced the grant to the schools. Teachers of the *taluk* were very careful after this. Some were no less afraid of me than of the Deputy Inspector.

After the formation of the Congress Ministry, there was a new hope and zeal, life and organisational awareness among peasants and workers. After the strikes of Truvannore and Feroke in 1935, new worker unions were formed all over Kerala. Even the least advanced workers formed unions and placed their urgent demands before the government and em-

ployers. Soap workers, fishing workers, *beedi* workers, stone workers, municipal workers— all types of workers began to organise themselves. They conducted struggles against retrenchment at will and for recognition of unions. The capitalists' scoldings and kicks and blows came to be a thing of the past. Thus, struggles abounded during the Congress Ministry's term in power.

The Commonwealth Tile Factory workers at Calicut struck work at this time. Although the Labour Minister, V. V. Giri, summoned the British Manager and discussed the problem with him, the Manager did not submit to the Minister's truce formula. The police maltreated the workers during the strike and Comrade Krishna Pillai was charged with creating public nuisance.

Beedi workers struck work at Tellicherry, Cannanore and neighbouring places. These strikes were very well organised. An interesting incident occurred during the Tellicherry strike. It was a time when peasant unions were growing in suburban areas like Pinarayi and Eranjoli. At a meeting at Eranjoli, I requested peasants to help the striking workers. I said it was the duty of peasants to help workers. There was a public meeting at the Tellicherry beach the next day. Peasants came for that meeting in large processions from Pinarayi, Eranjoli and other places. They had brought with them jack fruit, mangoes, coconuts and green bananas. A dozen emaciated old men led the procession leaning on sticks. The fruit brought by the peasants was heaped up at the beach. At the end of my speech, an old man got up and said almost weeping, *As long as we are alive, these worker-boys don't have to fear. We shall provide*

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them their food. There were more joint demonstrations of peasants and workers here. Peasants started helping workers when they were on strike and vice versa. A new peasant-worker relationship developed.

The Cannanore *beedi* workers' strike too was long drawn out. Besides the general opposition of capitalists, there was also opposition from Congress leaders like Samuel Aron. The employers felt that they should crush the strike in their own interests. But the strike was carried on because of the class feeling and organisational strength of the brave *beedi* workers of Cannanore. There was finally a settlement and the strike was withdrawn. This strike inspired all the families of workers. One day during the strike, the mother of a worker wanted to see me. I went to see her at her house. She said: *My son went to the company yesterday after so many days strike. He was one with his colleagues till now. But he has now betrayed them. I said I would starve myself and give him money for meals and incidental expenses. Still, he did not pay heed. I am not educated. I can neither read nor write. But still I know that nothing can be achieved without union. Look at the capitalists. Even old enemies have joined together now. Our boys do not have even that much intelligence.* I was amazed by the class feeling and intelligence of this old woman.

Afterwards, the weaving workers of Kakkad, Chovva and Azheekode joined together and went on strike. They struck on two occasions. On the first occasion the strike was withdrawn after a few days when some of the urgent demands of the workers were conceded. After that, the weaving company owners joined together and broke the conditions of the

settlement one by one and forced another strike. This strike was very prolonged. Workers stood firm. Some capitalists even filed law suits against them. A settlement was finally arrived at when some minor demands were accepted by the management.

I had thus to participate in numerous strikes and give leadership to them. I had occasion to participate in all the strikes that occurred in Kerala at that time. The moment a strike was known to have begun, I would rush there. When the strike ended, I moved to another place. To raise strike funds, to enroll volunteers, to detail work to them, to check up on it, to address public meetings, to intercept blacklegs going to work, to reason with them, to contact local people, to gain their help for the strike—this is what I was doing. I starved for want of time to eat food that was available, starved also for want of food to eat. I worked day and night, starving for one reason or another. Many nights went without sleep. But I had a special fondness for and interest in participating in these struggles. I could learn well from experience the condition of workers, the capitalist tie-up that emerged against their struggle and the change of colour of the middle classes. I learned how capitalists use workers devoid of class feeling to create a schism in their own ranks. I could see how the unemployed turn into a reserve force of employers. I saw not only workers but their families coming forward imbued with class feeling. I could see for myself the way workers who toil day and night live. Once while out walking at 1 o'clock at night an old woman ran up and invited us to her hut and treated us to sugar water. She knew that we were participating

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in the strike. *I will not send my son to the company unless you tell me to. If all these workers join together, the capitalist will have to accept their demands. Have we not learned this? If the workers do not work, how can the capitalist make a profit? He will have to starve. Our salvation lies in our unity.* Those were her words. This old woman had discovered from experience the theories of Stalin, Lenin and Marx.

As these struggles intensified, the Congress Ministry came out in its true colours. The firing at Chirala, the government's attitude to the Cawnpore strike, the government's policy towards the strikes in Kerala—all these affected the workers' faith in the Congress. They realised that workers would get full relief only if they themselves governed.

The Demand Declaration Day observed on September 18, 1937 at Calicut, Cannanore and Tellicherry is unforgettable in the history of the worker movement in Kerala. Workers held rallies in each place in crowds of ten and twenty thousand. A special feature of these was that all sections of workers participated in the demonstrations. They declared that they were ready to organise and if necessary to conduct struggles for their just demands. They let it be known that they were ready to play their part in the Indian freedom movement. Workers who had lived before as slaves of fate and destiny came forward to unite. They were not frightened by the capitalist-police bullies. Capitalists and police authorities realised that their hey-day was over and that they could no longer have their will unchallenged.

A mighty awakening and union feeling was observed among peasants. They were even prepared to combat

unjust oppression by landlords and the ruling classes. The feeling grew among them that nothing was impossible of achievement through peasant unions and a unity based on class feeling. This new awakening prompted them to protest openly against the repression that they had suffered and continued to suffer.

A peasant conference was held at a place called Padiyoor near Iritty. I was President of the Conference. Landlords and the police got ready to prevent it. The ASP, Circle Inspector and some policemen were there in advance. They came to the meeting and said that the owner of the site was not agreeable to the meeting being held there. I told them that I would see to all that and that it was not right for the police to interfere unnecessarily in this matter.

The peasants were in high spirits. Their fear disappeared. A member of a large landlord family of the locality one day sent somebody to fetch the daughter of a peasant living on his land. The peasant said that she had eye sickness. The landlord replied: *Eye is not what is wanted. Therefore, ask her to come.* They had to submit to the landlord's order. After a few days, her eyes became very sore and she lost her sight. When I asked whether this was not true, the peasant who was her father replied: *Yes, she is my daughter.* Thus, peasants started openly attacking landlords' oppression.

The peasant movement came into its own in Blathur, Padiyoor, Ellerinji and other eastern regions of Chirakkal *taluk*, in Iritti, Kannavam and Mattanoor in Kottayam *taluk* and in Kuttyadi and other places in Kurumbranad. It was through struggles against *Vasi* and *Nuri* extortion that the movement

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grew in Chirakkal *taluk*. Regional groups were formed. Membership increased. The people started ostracising those who did not join the peasants' union. They were emboldened by the thought that the union and union leaders were there to help them and to lead their struggles.

Their first objective was to take processions to landlords and officials with a list of their urgent demands. Mighty *jathas* started out to meet the landlords in every region, including the Chirakkal prince and the Nayanar of Ellerinji. The entire peasantry in each region participated in these *jathas*. Some landlords conceded the immediate demands of the peasants. These minor reliefs instilled self-confidence among the peasantry. The feeling grew that with union everything was possible. They started fearlessly opposing those who stood against their unions and demands. Peasants who used to tremble before started saying to me, *Policemen are like grass to us. We can trample them underfoot*. They used to refer to the punitive police organised by the ministry as *Poonatile police*. They were ready to suffer any oppression. They believed that their unions would save them.

December 18, 1938 opened a new chapter in the history of the Kerala peasantry. Under the leadership of Chandroth and E. P. Gopalan, two *jathas* consisting of 500 persons each started from Karivellore in the south and Kanjikode in the north to apprise the Collector of their minimum demands. These *jathas* were different from other ones. They consisted of regular peasant activists elected by each local unit. Many had not seen Calicut before. There were also many elderly people. A thousand red-clad peasants arrived at Chevayoor

on the morning of the 18th. A meeting was held under my presidency. Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon inaugurated the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, the *jatha* left for the town. Uniformed volunteers from Cannanore, Tellicherry and Calicut came in a procession to the town to receive them. Both joined together and marched to the beach in a massive procession and held a *Kisan-Mazdoor rally*. This rally generated the greatest enthusiasm. The peasant patriarch K. Koran inspired everyone by his speech. The peasants were encouraged to work all the more.

After this meeting, government officials and landlords joined to suppress the budding peasant movement. At about the same time, the peasants of Kasaragod went to Mangalore under the leadership of Subramanyan Thirumumpu and presented a memorandum to the Collector. Unlike the Malabar Collector, the Mangalore Collector met the *jatha*.

Both the landlords and officials realised that their future would be in peril unless this movement was crushed rapidly. They sent bogus reports. The Congress ministry took them all at face value. Punitive police were posted to the interior; new police stations were opened. The police started browbeating the peasant union workers. Peasants were arrested in large numbers and beaten up on charges of rape, stealing timber from the forest, assault and dacoity. 151 people were implicated in 17 places in Chirakkal *taluk* alone.

The Blathur office of the peasants union was set afire. At Peravamparamb, grass taken on lease by some peasants for thatching purposes was set afire at night and reduced

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to ashes. Barbarism like stoning of the houses of peasants, defecating in their wells, chasing their womenfolk in the nude were indulged in. The atrocities of the police and the rowdies set loose by landlords reached new heights. Landlordism and bureaucracy started a death dance. But none of these was able to alter the peasant's determination to fight for his rights. They contested the cases. Defence committees were formed. Funds were collected from the people. Workers helped them.

I was able to participate in these peasant struggles and instill confidence and courage in a small section of the peasants that had no class feeling. I strongly criticised the repressions of the police. Peasant conferences and special meetings were held. Peasants have a special trait. If there is somebody to guide them, they are ready for anything. It was therefore necessary to visit each locality repeatedly to arouse them. I was able to do this well.

Bharatheeyan was sentenced to six months imprisonment at the time on a charge of incitement to violence. A case was made out against me too and I was summoned. But as I left India, the case could not be pursued. There was another case for contempt of court. This was conducted *ex-parte* and a sentence of two months imprisonment was passed.

Until 1938 I worked among peasants and workers and participated in their struggles and was able to learn more and more about them and their problems. I noted the pitiable conditions of peasants in the interior. I found that it was quite easy to instil class consciousness in the poor peasant who offered to the landlord whatever he had earned from the sweat on his brow. They do not know the meaning of freedom for

they have suffered persecution for centuries together. When through united action they found mitigation of their misery they found a new self-respect and no longer cringed before their oppressors.

Big public meetings were held at Kodakkat and Blathur during the tour of Professor Ranga who was President of All-India Kisan Sabha. 15,000 peasants attended at Kodakkat and 10,000 at Blathur. There were many peasant women at the meeting at Blathur. I announced that a struggle might be necessary to get firewood and bark (of trees) from the forest. They gave assurance that they were ready for the struggle. Asked whether they were prepared to go to jail, they replied as one man in the affirmative. There was thus a change in the attitude of the families of peasants.

Their children formed boys associations. These associations came into their own in the northern *taluks*. Peasants and their womenfolk started joining peasants' unions and working for them.

As in the case of workers' struggles, I was able to learn much from peasants' struggles too. I felt the necessity of doing something, not only in economic matters, but in the cultural sphere also. Night schools and reading rooms were started. The union was able to curb the drinking habit among them. A start was made in publishing books that the peasants could understand.

Comrade K. Damodaran's play *Rent Arrears* was also very useful in mobilising peasants and in bringing them together. It was at that time that I realised the importance of cultural programmes. *Rent Arrears* was staged wherever peasant con-

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ferences were held. Damodaran, KPR Gopalan, Perachutti, P. Sekharan and others were in the cast. I myself acted in it.

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The agitation for responsible government of the princely states was the most important movement that emerged from the Indian nationalist movement in 1937-38. The 10 crore people of the princely states entered the political arena and started fighting for civil liberties and responsible government.

Agitations on a small scale were started in many princely states. On April 28, 1938, 32 people died and 42 sustained injuries in police firing in the village of Viddoraswatham in the Kolar district of Mysore. Their struggle was for freedom to unfurl the national flag and for freedom of speech. The subjects of the princely states were also motivated by the Rajkot struggle which had repercussions throughout India.

The Travancore struggle is so glorious that it should be recorded in golden letters in the history of the Indian freedom struggle. The principal reason for this was the role played by workers and students who constituted the main revolutionary forces in this struggle and their readiness to undergo sacrifices. I was a witness to the role of these two revolutionary forces in the struggle as I had occasion to participate in the strike of the workers of Alleppey and to meet college students of

Alwaye and Kottayam at the time the *jatha* was organised.

Everywhere in Travancore, there was discontent and misery. The condition of workers was most unhappy. They had neither the freedom to come together nor the facilities required for redressing their grievances. As far as peasants were concerned, their backs had already been broken by maltreatment from officials, the slump in the prices of coir products and heavy taxation. The government was unable to satisfy even community interests which laid claims on offices and representation. Moreover, the merchant-capitalist class were furious over the nationalised economic enterprises, transport, electrification, etc., which they wanted to control themselves. A large section of the monied classes felt that the collapse of the Travancore National and Quilon Bank was speeded up by the government. This prompted those representing banking interests to wage an open war against the government. Discontent, economic and political conflict—all the ingredients of a revolutionary situation existed.

The reform movement for justice to all communities and for termination of the monopoly enjoyed by some communities in the civil service marked a new chapter in the political history of Travancore. The government tried to repress this movement. But the snow-balling discontent, the world-wide economic depression, increased bureaucratic domination and the headway made by Congress in British India—all these created circumstances favourable for a concerted drive for responsible government. It led to the creation of a mass organisation encompassing the entire people of Travancore. They formed themselves under the banner of the State Congress.

The KPCC agitation began on August 28, 1938. The activity of the Youth League had spurred this agitation. Comrade N. C. Sekhar defied section 144 IPC and courted arrest. K. Damodaran, Sreedharan and other youth leaguers were arrested. The State Congress got ready for defiance of the law.

Students were in the vanguard of the agitation. A witch-hunt for student-activists was launched in Trivandrum on July 15. There was firing at the beach on September 21, and on August 31 at Neyyatinkara and then again at Quilon on September 2. At Chengannur there was very heavy firing and a *lathi charge*.

Ruffians were set loose to create disorder in public meetings. The government started many new organisations in opposition to the Kerala Congress. Ruffians were commissioned to hunt out Kerala Congress leaders. Their houses were burgled and other atrocities perpetrated there. Atrocities of a kind not witnessed anywhere else in India, whether British or native, were perpetrated. Firing became the order of the day.

The Travancore struggle was not a local struggle but part of an All-India struggle. Nationally, it was a struggle against British imperialism. It was the forerunner of the struggle against federation by the subjects of the princely states. Congressmen realised this.

The Kerala Congress Committee set up a sub-committee to help the Travancore struggle, and conducted a propaganda campaign for it. The Working Committee of the Congress Socialist Party met and decided that party workers should participate actively in the struggle. It was decided to send

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a *jatha* on foot to Travancore. I was designated its leader. My appointment received the approval of the sub-committee. The repressions taking place in Travancore infuriated me. I yearned to struggle against the bureaucratic hunt going on there. The party decision satisfied me.

A huge public meeting was held at the Calicut beach on September 9, 1938 to see off the Travancore *jatha*. It was a vast meeting consisting of Congressmen and others, workers and students. It was a model of the united front against imperialism. Kozhippurathu Madhava Menon, V. R. Nayanar, K. A. Damodara Menon, KPCC President Abdul Rahiman and Municipal Chairman U. Gopala Menon attended the meeting.

It was the fourth *jatha* under my leadership. It could be safely said that I was one of the creators of the *jatha* idea. Unlike other *jathas*, there were only very few experienced agitators in this one. Most of its members were youngsters who wanted to participate in the coming freedom struggle. They were up to anything. Many were later to become leading workers of the Communist Party. They played a considerable part in the Travancore struggle. Several Congress youths were also there in the *jatha*.

Marches, singing and distribution of leaflets proceeded apace as in other *jathas*. The *jatha* got big receptions on the way. The ovation of the Muslims of Eranad was particularly noteworthy. There were large receptions by Congress committees and peasant unions at Cheruvannore, Ramanattukara, Pulikkal, Kondotti, Nediyruppu, Manjeri, Malappuram, Ramapuram, Perinthalmanna, Thootha, Cherpulacherry and Ottappalam.

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We reached Ernakulam on September 16 via Shoranur, Wadancherry and Trichur. People of various organisations and of all communities participated in the public meeting at Trichur. Eight volunteers joined the *jatha* at Trichur. At Ernakulam, we were joined by a group that had come from Mangalore under the leadership of Comrade Kamath.

Ernakulam gave us a grand reception. College students, men as well as women, joined the reception — a crowd of some 20,000 people. Comrade Punnose, who was then a Kerala Congress leader and who was later to become a Communist leader of Travancore, enthused everyone with his speech. This was my first meeting with Comrade Punnose. I was invited to the college girls' hostel after the meeting. The Travancorean and non-Travancorean girls presented us with a purse.

We left for Alwaye on September 19 by the morning train. I informed my colleagues that very intense repression would be unleashed at Alwaye and that everyone should be prepared for this. I reminded them that atrocities and firing were in the offing, and added that those who were not prepared to face these dismal prospects could help further the struggle in some other way. But all showed great mental daring and firmness. Everyone wanted an opportunity to die for the cause in the event of firing.

An unforgettable reception awaited us when the train reached Alwaye. The whole place echoed with cries of *Malabar jatha ki jai* and *State Congress ki jai*. The platform was filled with welcoming people. There was nothing but human heads to be seen in the vicinity of the station. A sea of mankind. Old and young, capitalists, workers and peasants,

women as well as men were all assembled together. The entire student body of the Alwaye colleges had awaited us since the previous day. A large section of the students of an Ernakulam college had accompanied us in the train.

Heavy rains—water rushing into the river down the mountain valleys. Everything on the way was inundated by the rushing waters. I felt as though it was a tributary of the Alwaye river near the station—a river receiving onrushing water from all four quarters, and overflowing its banks in its turbulent course. What enthusiasm! What ardour! What courage! Firings were a daily event. People were dying like flies. The army was out in the streets. I was thrilled by the courage of the vast populace that had come to welcome the volunteers from Malabar without the slightest worry about what was happening and what might happen. Completely unconcerned about the guns and *lathis* of the army and the reserve police, they seemed to say, *Your firing is like grass, grass to us, to be trampled underfoot*. Forgetting myself for a moment, I shouted *State Congress ki jai, Travancore people ki jai*. I was certain that a thousand CP's (C. P. Ramaswami Iyer) could not suppress this mass of humanity. Young students, men as well as women, adolescents blossoming into life (who had barely experienced life), who were ready to die for their country. They did not want to study or live under this shameless autocratic regime. Responsible government or death. That was the chant of these youthful agitators. A spectacle that would have electrified anybody with a human heart or a pulsating body.

On the other side were reserve police, army men, ordi-

nary police, inspectors, DSP and all. The whole Travancore boundary was filled with police, troops and police vans. All the paraphernalia calculated to smother civil liberties was there.

I have participated in struggles in British India and have led strikes and agitations of mammoth proportions. But the enthusiasm, courage and general disposition towards agitation that I saw on that day was something that I had never seen before. I yearned for an opportunity to die a victim to the police firing. I believed that my death in this vast stir—in this upsurge of the brave Travancore people fighting for responsible government—would serve a purpose. I felt an urge to die. The like readiness of the youthful students and the brave workers made me all the more enthusiastic. I was not sure that that crowd, which yearned to welcome the Malabar comrades who had arrived to participate in their struggle, would keep quiet in the event of police atrocities against us.

During a tussle with volunteers and the police, I found a hefty Christian priest emerging from the crowd, remonstrating with an Inspector who had chased a volunteer, and grabbing hold of him. I thought something untoward would happen. I ran to the scene. The priest was telling the Inspector: Do not touch them, sir. You may shoot us if you like. No objection. Do anything you like. If you touch these people who have come from Malabar to succour us, no one will be left alive here. *Sure.* The Inspector immediately left. The priest took my hand and kissed it affectionately. He said: *We have made arrangements in case someone troubles you. None of them will be left alive.* I understood what he was saying. I

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told him that violence was of no use and individual violence would only hinder the movement. He then gave his word that nothing untoward would happen. I found this kind of loyal and helpful disposition among the common people as well.

Immediately after detraining, we crossed the boundary and marched into the state. The police intercepted us at the railway gate. We remained there. I called on the volunteers and told them to cross the boundary from different directions. They left in different directions. The police ran after them. Our volunteers raced and leapt in different directions to elude the police. The Dewan had ordered that we should not be arrested or manhandled. He knew what the consequences of that would be. Tussles began between the police and the volunteers. This enthused the people, but enraged the police.

By 3 o'clock the crowd had increased. I spoke to the crowd for about three hours. I asked the Alway college students whether they were ready to boycott classes. They replied that they were ready. This demonstration had raised them to a fever-pitch of excitement and enthusiasm. I called for funds. 30 rupees was collected on the spot in small change.

We found that the government was not going to arrest us. Some volunteers evaded the police and crossed the boundary. They were arrested. At 8pm the police changed their tactics. They posted guards. I and other volunteers crossed the boundary. We were also arrested. The first batch was detained at the Alway lock-up; we were detained at Perumbavoor lock-up.

This maiden *jatha* constituted a mighty propaganda effort. It magnetized not only Kerala but other states as well. After we were arrested, a second *jatha* set out under the leadership

of Mohammed Yusuf. A third one started from Tellicherry under Anandan's leadership. A fourth was organised at Palghat. From Tamil Nadu, a *jatha* came to Madurai. Freedom-lovers outside Kerala thus started plunging themselves into the struggle. Alwaye soon became centre of the agitation. College students started boycotting classes. They set out one by one to violate the law. Even in Paroor and other places people were stirred.

The police administration in Travancore was of a special type. A majority of the policemen had passed out of school or college. Once they joined the department, human feelings left them. majority of them were notorious as ruffians. By dint of ill-treating people and beating the poor, they had lost all qualms about committing atrocities. To ill-treat somebody was a daily routine for them, like having meals. It was doubtful if anybody would take you seriously if you cited the name of a policeman who did not take bribes. I still remember what one wag said: *Only the milestone and the direction post are beyond corruption in Travancore.* This was quite true of Travancore. I found it to be quite common for policemen to arrest passers-by on the roads, drag them to police stations, beat them and steal their possessions.

An interesting incident occurred while I was in the lock-up. At noon one day a policeman brought in a 14 year old boy. There was a tea shop frequented by Constable Krishna Pillai 'Sir'. 'Sir' never used to pay. He used to help the shop-owner, who was a profiteer, in a variety of ways. Well, these people have to maintain law and order. They maintain law with guns and *lathis*. This boy was brought to the station

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because the owner had complained that he had pilfered 4 annas. He was subjected to a thorough physical examination as soon as he was brought in and the eight annas that he had with him was confiscated. He was pinned to the wall and beaten. It was an experiment to find out which policeman would be able to knock his head backwards. Those profligates started a regular match, with the head of this 14 year old youth as the ball. He started bleeding from the head. An aged policeman who walked in called him back and examined him and contributed his share to the sport! The Travancore police played mercilessly with human life.

By evening, the human hunt intensified. An incident occurred while I was in the Vaikom lock-up. A constable looking for the wherewithal for that day's visit to the tavern met two vessel merchants and brought them to the station. They had with them the proceeds of that day's sale and the unsold vessels. Immediately upon arrival, they were beaten. Then they were allowed to rest for a while. They were left close to the room where I was confined. I called them and advised them to leave on the pretext of going to eat. They were let off for a meal. They left behind two or three vessels that they had. They never came back. The police started hunting for them. The vessels were sold after two days and the proceeds shared by the policemen.

There was no protest at all against police high-handedness. Constable *Sir* continued to be a big *Sir*. Afraid of being beaten, all would cringe before him. I nourished an indescribable hatred towards the police after this experience.

Life in the confines of the lock-up was agonising. But

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the company of Kadamangalam Pappukutty, a writer from Travancore, Paravoor Balakrishna Pillai, a lawyer, some comrades of Alwaye and of Chandrasekharan Vaidyar provided some relief.

Finally, the case against us was begun. The Perumbavoor court was filled with people. All the others said they had nothing to say when the charge sheet was read out to them. This was not expected by the police. I decided to expose the misdeeds of the police. I cross-examined the first witness, Sub-Inspector Chacko:

I: *What's your name?*

Sub-Inspector: *Chacko.*

I: *Have you ever been punished for accepting a bribe?*

The Sub-Inspector did not reply. He looked at me gravely.

I: *Mr. Chacko, you must understand that you are a witness in the witness box and not a Sub-Inspector commissioned to disperse a crowd. I am the accused and you must answer my questions.*

I addressed the magistrate: *Your honour, if the Sub-Inspector does not answer my questions, I don't think there is any use taking part in the proceedings.*

The magistrate asked the Sub-Inspector to reply to the questions.

Sub-Inspector: *No, there has been no bribery case against me.*

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I: *You say we shouted slogans and it is an offence. What were the slogans?*

Sub-Inspector: *You cried inquilab-zindabad. It is an offence.*

I: *Do you know what language the slogan is in?*

Sub-Inspector: *That I don't know. I know its meaning is Create disturbances.*

I: *What is the charge against us?*

Sub-Inspector: *You entered Travancore violating a government order.*

I: *Were we shown section 144 IPC prohibiting entry? Were our signatures taken on that?*

Sub-Inspector: *The order was not shown. It was in the DSP's pocket. It must be known to you.*

I: *Are we being punished for keeping the order in the DSP's pocket?*

Sub-Inspector: *I have nothing to say to that.*

I: *Do you know what responsible government means?*

Sub-Inspector: *I don't know.*

I: *Do you know it means a ministry responsible to the people elected by MLA's elected by the people under the King?*

Sub-Inspector: *I have not learnt that. I know that the Kerala Congress is a group out to create commotion.*

1: *Do you know that self-government is now in existence in nine states in British India?*⁹

Sub-Inspector: *No.*

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I: Did we create disorder! Did we turn violent?

Sub-Inspector: You did. You made people shout inquilab-zindahad. You ran here and there. You asked students not to go to school. You said taxes should not be paid. There was violation of law in Alwaye and its surroundings after your arrival.

I cross-examined him like this for about an hour. We contested the case. We asked the Magistrate not to regard as a crime against us the charge that we violated section 144 IPC. We thus used the hearing for political propaganda. As this was the first development of its kind in Travancore, the people were attracted to the hearings.

A. M. Kunjikannan, K. T. Madhavan Nair and I were sentenced to eight months imprisonment. It was decided to take the others in a truck and release them outside the state borders. I told those who were not sentenced to go to other places one by one and participate in the agitation. I learnt later that they did exactly that.

We were sent that night to the Kottayam lock-up. I sensed that the cross-examination had enraged the policemen and that we would have to suffer brutalities. I prepared myself for that.

Kottayam has a small police-station. There were some Kerala Congress prisoners in one room awaiting trial. We were locked inside a small and unlit room. It was full of urine and faecal matter. It was not possible even to sit down. In the morning, policemen came in and started shouting. They wanted to make us angry. I spoke equably to them. They manhandled us severely. I found that they were preparing for

a second round of assault. We started fasting.

The students and other people of Kottayam learnt the news. They gathered around the jail and started shouting slogans. It became the talk of the town. CID Constable John's threat to finish us off also leaked out. The police took us in a car that night to the comparatively quiet Vaikom sub-jail. We stopped the fast temporarily.

However, when we found that we were not to be taken to Central jail, I started fasting on my own. It lasted about five days. The news spread to Vaikom and surrounding places. A rumour spread that I had died while fasting. People assembled before the sub-jail. Even *hartals* were held in some places in mourning for my death. One day, the ASP told me about the rumour and asked me to come out and reassure the people waiting outside the station. I did not care to. The disturbance increased. Public meetings were held. Finally, K. R. Narayanan, who was later to become a government man, came to ask me to stop the fast and say that they would do the needful. I stopped the fast.

I could see that the struggle was coming off well. Taxes were withheld and strikes began. The brave workers of Alleppey began a political strike. The government was completely shaken. It was decided that about 100,000 people should set out from various parts of the state to petition the Maharaja on his birthday. The government felt the need to stem this mighty agitation at least temporarily. What CP did was to release the Kerala Congress leaders and to concentrate the entire police force on the workers. On the birthday, all prisoners were released. We too were released from the



Gopalan fasting

Vaikom lock-up. I rested for three or four days at Vaikom as the rigours of jail life had greatly enfeebled me.

Propaganda campaigns were later started in Alwaye, Kottayam, Parur, Mavelikkara and many other places in north Travancore. I could see a considerable awakening and interest among the people. But even the leaders had no idea as to the future course of action. The struggle did not possess a leadership that had any concrete ideas about its objectives or about the means to realise those objectives. There was not even a proper organisation behind the leadership. That struggle was only a crude and almost involuntary demonstration against the inequities suffered by the people for centuries from feudal overlordship. In course of time, however, the struggle lost its community colour completely and the slogan of responsible government came to the forefront.

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Although the leadership of the struggle was of such a nature, revolutionary forces that joined it played an active and important role. Nowhere else in India had workers conducted a political strike on such a scale. Likewise, it was the students who first entered the arena and bore the brunt of atrocities and roused the entire people of Travancore. Not only men, but even women students, came out and stoically endured the utmost brutalities. From the heroically self-sacrificing spirit of students, the eager participation of the masses in their thousands, the increasing prestige of the Kerala Congress, and the political strikes of the workers, I was convinced that the people of Travancore would be able to capture responsible government. But that was not to be. The struggle failed on account of the absence of a deliberate and uniform organisational structure, the inability to correctly gauge the tactics employed by the government to repress it and the inability to assess properly the tactics employed by the government to divide and weaken the Kerala Congress and to match those tactics with counter programmes.

Two days before the release of the leaders, in October 1938, a strike began in Alleppey.

Alleppey was a most important centre of the coir industry. There were numerous coir factories in the Ambalapuzha and Shertallay *taluks* extending for 33 miles from Aroor on the border of Cochin and Travancore to Punnapra six miles south of Alleppey. About 30,000 workers were engaged in this industry in Alleppey town itself.

The Travancore Labour Association was a very strong organisation of workers. In the early days, the workers suf-

ferred untold miseries. At a special meeting of the Association held on Menam it was decided to send a *jatha* of 50 members to Trivandrum to bring their long-standing demands to the attention of the government. But the government immediately issued prohibitory orders. This agitation was suppressed through arrests and the application of penal law provisions. Workers protested against this repression through strikes and demonstrations.

The Union took a decision to strike in the second week of February, 1938. The government again issued prohibitory orders. Leaders were arrested. When the arrested activists were being taken to the police station, workers gathered there in small crowds. A worker named Bawa suffered martyrdom in the *lathi charge* conducted by the police to disperse the crowd.

The political atmosphere of Travancore became heated after this as a result of the Kerala Congress activities. Workers passed resolutions welcoming the Kerala Congress and requesting that their urgent demands be included in the Congress programme. Workers thus played an active role in the political struggle in Travancore. Workers started fighting in the forefront of the Kerala Congress agitation for responsible government. When the government tried to frustrate the struggle, the coir factory workers announced a strike from October 18 for their urgent demands and for responsible government with adult franchise.

The strike declaration meeting held two days prior to the strike under the presidency of Comrade K. K. Warriar was an important one in the history of the Alleppey Work-

ers movement. Comrade Warriar's humorous and exciting speech enthused the workers and enraged the government. That is why Comrade Warriar was beaten with a granite stone after his arrest.

Right from the beginning the government did the needful to repress the strike. The Kerala Congress leaders were released and the army was deployed at Alleppey in strength. Government agents were sent to set factories on fire and to create disturbance to make out that workers were indulging in violence.

There was firing near the cremation ground bridge. Four died in the firing. Afterwards, the workers' homes were invaded and all of them were beaten up. Houses were set afire. Passersby were manhandled.

A procession was arranged for the day after the firing. Comrade Krishna Pillai asked me to report immediately to lead the procession. I was then campaigning in north Travancore after coming out of jail. I reached Alleppey. But on account of opposition by a section of worker-leaders the *jatha* was not organised.

A meeting was held at Kidangamparambu grounds in an effort to boost the falling morale of the workers. In my speech I attacked the police brutalities very strongly. The people applauded. Fear disappeared. I knew that I would have to suffer police high-handedness and was prepared for it.

Organising strike meetings of workers, meeting workers in their centres, and conducting public meetings kept me busy afterwards. Even the terrible repression suffered by the work-

ers did not shake their determination. They continued to hold group meetings on schedule and continued the picketing. I was able to meet the Alleppey workers and their families. Not only the workers, but even their families, acted courageously. When the police were attacking workers in their homes, the old mother of a Christian worker kept feeding the volunteers, taking care of their uniforms and helping the strike even at night. That old lady is even today the Party's own mother. All worker families were made of such mettle.

Even prior to this, there were in Alleppey many activists sent by the Socialist Party from Malabar. The Party was able to turn this strike into a political one and to provide it with effective leadership. Workers who hitherto had found in their union a means for economic betterment, started educating themselves politically. The Party played a large role in this struggle and Comrade Krishna Pillai extended his leadership to the strike as he had done in the Kerala Congress agitation.

The strike was settled in a week. It became very difficult to send back the workers to the factory. But they accepted the union decision. I was making a round of the factories in a rickshaw on the day the strike ended to persuade the workers to return to work. The police Inspector arrested me at that time and took me to the police station. As soon as the workers came out on hearing the news, the Inspector let me go saying that I had never been arrested.

Although the strike at Alleppey ended, the employers at Shertallay, Muhamma and other places were not prepared for a settlement. I worked for about a week at Shertallay and Muhamma. Finally, the strike was ended on the basis of an

agreement. As I came to know that I would be arrested when the strike was over, I decided to leave Travancore.

It was at this time that I came into contact with Kerala Congress leaders and people like Comrade Sugathan, C. K. Velayudhan and Varghese Vaidyan. Sugathan was the most cherished leader of workers. He used alike both dialectic and abuse. Comrades were never offended by it. Although old, C. K. Velayudhan was young in his actions.

Comrade K. C. George, who was a Kerala Congress leader and party leader of Travancore, was a peculiar kind of man. I found a man sitting at the Ernakulam office during the struggle. He wore soiled clothes, and had an uncouth unfashionable way of dressing. He was introduced to me as our leader with MA, and LLB degrees. I did not like the man initially. When he stood up and started walking, I was surprised to see he was lame. He was a placid leader, beloved of people of all parties in Travancore. He himself had no pretensions to leadership but the people accepted him as such. While everyone ate at Modern Hotel and Sugunavilasam, he would be hunting for the cheapest hotel serving a meal for 1½ annas. Later association only increased my sincere regard for Comrade George. I also met Comrades Bhasi, CS, MN and others.

I was able to get in touch with Kerala Congress leaders, workers' leaders and the people of the native states and to study their problems. I was able to make a comparative study of the brave workers of Alleppey, among whom trade unionism developed with phenomenal rapidity, and the trade union activities of Malabar and draw certain conclusions. While in one place trade unions were built up on the basis of economic

demands alone, the greatest attention was given in the other place to political resolutions and agitations. I was able to study the problems of the native states of Cochin and Travancore, the political parties functioning there and the relationship between them. I was thus able to widen my perspective from Malabar to Kerala.

At the same time, I was able to establish contact with Tamil Nadu too. It was at this time that I presided at the Tindivanam district conference and the Rajapalayam state conference and made the acquaintance of people there. I got acquainted with worker-leaders of Madurai, Trichinopoly and other places too. It was on account of these associations that I was able later on to function in Tamil Nadu. I started developing a state-wide perspective and viewpoint. This helped me to view and study labour problems from a broader perspective.

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Chapter 11

Literature plays a considerable role in eradicating the injustices, iniquity and malpractices that appear in society from time to time. Poets like Vallathol and Kumaran Asan have fought relentlessly against the malpractices and often the iniquitous customs of Kerala. They have thus been able to create a new atmosphere. Literature appeals to the human mind very strongly and can transform it. In the struggle for social, economic and political change the pen is no less important than the warrior who takes up arms and fights a relentless battle against the enemy. There must be progressive literary movements in every age if society is to prosper.

As long as there are different interests, there cannot but be different classes. Each class will strive to the utmost to preserve its interests. There was a time when the printing presses, publishing houses and writers were slaves and sycophants of the capitalist class. It was therefore necessary to have a literature that portrayed the crying needs of the oppressed classes and the struggle for their rights. Systems of government, the economic structure of society and man's living habits are subject to daily change. Change is the law of

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life. The writer is a social being. He cannot live without being a party to this change. Progressive literature which embodies this change is necessary for the progress of society and the nation.

After the Congress Socialist Party was formed as a group inside the Congress, and socialist propaganda spread everywhere, and as workers and peasants formed their own organisations, capitalist papers and papers serving the capitalist interests started strongly attacking this new movement. They sometimes even spread calumnies against it. This created a confusion of ideas among the people. They went so far as to picture socialism as a dread disease. They visualised the future social system in a grotesque manner. Against this background, the Party was convinced of the imperative need for a newspaper that would participate in the daily struggles of peasants, workers and other oppressed classes, expose libels against the Party, undertake socialist propaganda work, deliver from confusion of ideas the many young men who had participated and who would participate in the freedom struggle, instil political consciousness and knowledge in them and build up strong class feelings in the oppressed sections. But the party had no funds for a press and newspaper.

This was due in a large measure to the organisational weakness of the Congress Socialist Party. However, the paper *Prabhatham* was started at Shoranur in 1935 under Comrade EMS's leadership. In the absence of a good press and a permanent staff, the running of the paper was not at all easy. Comrade EMS was the editor. He had the cooperation of the ICP and M. P. Bhattathiripad and others. With the birth of this

newspaper, we were able to educate the people theoretically. But not long afterwards the government asked for a bond of one thousand rupees. The bond was demanded because of the publication of a poem entitled *Victory to Revolution* by Chowwara Parameswaran. As it was not possible to deposit the amount, the paper was stopped. It was a great loss to the Party. Not long after the Congress formed the Ministry, we received permission to restart the paper. The publication of the paper was resumed in April, 1938. The Party appointed me Manager.

There were no assets except an old and ill-equipped press. The only capital that the paper had was the union of class-conscious peasants and workers. It was a time of 'struggles' by peasants and workers. Moreover, the Congress was in power. Therefore, the people, especially peasants and workers, realised the need for a paper. Impelled by this, I toured North Malabar planning to restart the paper in a week. The people responded very well. Worker and peasant unions and even some landlords helped and 250 rupees were collected in a week. The paper was started.

On the day the paper was launched, I went to preside over the peasant conference at Alipparambu. I took with me some copies of the paper. The price of a single copy was two annas. The moment they saw the paper, peasants and workers bought all the available copies. Many became subscribers and gave donations. Unlike that of capitalist newspapers, the printing and layout of the paper were poor. But still the poor peasants turned it over in their hands with delight; read and grasped it as though they had received some priceless weapon. I realised

the crying need for a class-based newspaper. It was only the class feeling of workers, peasants and other supporters that made the running of the paper possible with barely any capital.

Chief among those who helped Comrade EMS in running the paper were Comrades K. Damodaran, Subramanya Sharma and P. Narayanan Nair. Each one had a part to play in improving the paper and in adapting its coverage to changing circumstances.

There are no Comrades in Kerala who do not know Comrade K. Damodaran. He has written many books for the Party and conducted classes after he returned from studies at Benares.

When Comrade K. Damodaran was arrested in the Travancore struggle, Comrade Subramanya Sharma functioned as Editor. Later on, under the editorship of Comrade P. Narayanan Nair, the paper assumed its appropriate character. He was a very experienced journalist and one who knew the techniques and strategies of the *bourgeois* editor. He facilely learned the role and character of a party paper. *Prabhatham* became the paper, not only of workers and peasants, but of others also. It was even able to attract a section of Congressmen. It should be specially mentioned that Comrade EMS's supervision and assistance gave encouragement to all. New writers emerged. KPR, Keraleeyan and others started writing poetry. Poems calculated to enthuse the oppressed classes and to instil in them a spirit of freedom and anti-imperialism saw the light of day. T. Subramanyan Thirumumpu's composition:

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Peasants and the working class,
Exploited and the poor,
We shall congregate below this red flag;
Let us get ready for a start.
What for? To eradicate poverty,
To fight oppression,
To wreck and burn down
The fortress of capitalism
That gives birth to starvation,
To crush imperialist domination,
To erase landlordism.

Are we not necessary
To plough, to pay land rent
And to turn the machine?
If we unite, none of these will be possible,
It is enough if we know ourselves.
Let us go forward, forward,
No backward step any more.

and the lines of Premji:

We are not slaves and we will not rest content any
more,
We shall fight with feet entrenched;

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We are needed to toil in the mill daily from morning
till evening

And the capitalist is there to earn.

We should be there to step into the mud in the field;

And who fills the belly—feudal lords.

No clothes to wear, no shelter at night,

No *kanji* to drink,—what an injustice.

Are we not human? We also want to live in the world.

We are not born to suffer alone.

Government, we have seen you in your true colours,

We are not afraid any more of death.

began to be chanted even by children.

The people were inspired by the poems of Theruvattu Raman, KPG. and others, the short stories of Cherukad and Pottekad and Surendran's column *Let Me Say*. Even some Party workers started writing articles on their experiences. I have myself written four or five articles for *Prabhatham*. To me, to say the least, the rapid development of this paper with little experience and no finance worth the name was a remarkable achievement. New ideas, ideals and the conflicts in society came out in touching and simple language in the form of poems, articles and short stories. People started learning, teaching, thinking and arguing.

We encountered great difficulties in running the paper. Most people had no experience as journalists. I had no experience at all as Manager of a paper. Organisationally, the tradition of the CSP still prevailed, which meant in effect the absence of any organisation. Although I was Manager, I was generally absent from the office. I had to participate in conferences of workers and peasants and agitate against federation. Doing all these things at the same time meant doing none of them well. This was the plight of the editors and others connected with it. Comrade P. Sekharan who was assisting me was a worker-activist. In the event of a strike he had to rush there. During the Travancore struggle, the entire *Prabhatham* staff was there. The paper somehow survived. Whenever there was peasant struggle, everyone would report there. In short, the absence of a well laid out schedule of work for each member of the staff and the absence of regular training in efficient management of that work created great difficulties in the running of the paper.

Party workers were the paper's agents. Many full-time workers were there at that time. They had no means of livelihood. So, it was usual for them to spend the paper's meagre capital when in dire financial straits. Money stopped arriving regularly. There were financial arrears. The press was too illequipped to take on jobs from outside. By contacting people every week, by enrolling subscribers and by collecting donations, the paper was kept going from week to week. There had been no training to boost circulation through a proper agency system. Nor was there any provision or facility for undivided attention to this task.

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There came a time when it was even feared that the paper might fold up. As the circulation was increasing and as some leaflets had to be printed, there was urgent need for a good press. I therefore decided to go on a foreign tour to enlist subscribers for *Prabhatham* and to raise funds. There were other reasons too behind this decision. There was a police case pending against me for a speech I had made at Peralam earlier. The police were waiting for my return from the Tripuri AICC meeting. Moreover, I had been invited to preside at the annual conference of the Bharatha Youth Association of Ceylon. In these circumstances, the Party decided that rather than go to jail after the Tripuri meeting, I should go to Ceylon to canvass funds for *Prabhatham*. I was happy with this decision as I wanted to strengthen these contacts and to get acquainted with Party activities in India and abroad.

My membership of the AICC enabled me to participate in the annual conferences of the Indian National Congress. I attended the Haripura and Tripuri sessions. I was able, like others, to meet All-India Congress leaders and leaders of the Socialist and Communist parties. I stayed and worked in Bombay for three months after the Tripuri session and I was able to get to know Dr. K. B. Menon, Kesavan Nair, Narayanaswami and others. I met the Malayalees of Bombay and studied their problems and raised funds. At the same time, I was able to get acquainted with Communist leaders of Bombay, to visit the office of the then Communist organ *National Front* and to study journalism, to visit offices of Communist-led trade unions and to participate in worker rallies. This evoked in me a revulsion for the policies and programmes of the then lead-

ers of the CSP. It also brought me closer to the Communist Party and strengthened my ties with its leaders.

I was most attracted by the self-sacrificing spirit and political acumen of Comrades like Adhikari, P. C. Joshi, Ajoy Ghosh, Ghate and Sundarayya. I learned from close quarters the functioning of the National Front office and the miseries suffered by leaders while working. I had discussions with them and read their party literature. Comrade Joshi one day asked me to meet him the next day at 3 o'clock to discuss newspaper administration. I agreed. I arrived at 3:15. As a sudden engagement had taken him away, I was not able to see him. I was told that as I had not arrived in time, he would only be able to meet me the following day. The next day I arrived half an hour ahead of time. Comrade Joshi did not like this. He took me that day to a quiet Irani shop and ordered tea. We exchanged pleasantries for 15 minutes or so. He was acquainted with the general trend of our activities. We talked for half an hour longer after returning to the office. Thereafter, until I left Bombay, I used to meet Comrades Joshi and Adhikari regularly and discuss matters with them. I told Comrade Adhikari that I was collecting funds for *Prabhatham* and that I had already collected 500 rupees from Malayalees. *You collected 500 rupees from Malayalees, Comrade Adhikari asked me in wonder. From that day, Comrade Adhikari used to refer to me jokingly as that 500 rupee man .*

There were two types of people among the Bombay Malayalees. One section consisted of officers. They wanted to form a Malayalee organisation to celebrate Onam and Vishu, to have a place for entertainment after work, to run a store to

keep them supplied with towels and pappads from Kerala, and other such trivia. They had nothing to do with politics. Moreover, they did not want to have anything to do with politics.

There were many types of people in the other category Revolutionary youth who tried to understand the events around them against the background of their knowledge of Indian politics and contributed to the movement according to their resources, people who keenly watched the political movements in Kerala and helped to further them; Malayalee workers who had taken refuge there for employment with no political ideas at all; those who were interested only in the Malayalee Association; Gandhi-ist Congressmen; middle class socialists; workers—quite a mixed bag!

The friends of *Prabhatham* were Comrades E. C. Bharathan, Gopalan, Achuthan, Michael, Warriar, Menon, K. B. Panikkar and P. Balan. It was with their help and with the help of K. B. Menon, Kesavan Nair and Narayanaswami and, most important of all, Bavunni Ezhuthachan, that 500 rupees could be collected for *Prabhatham*. I was able to get acquainted with the workers of Sewri and Worli and to organise a worker group at Sewri. Moreover, I addressed Malayalee meetings on the Congress work in Kerala and the peasant unions. A youth group was formed to assist the work in Kerala and to boost the circulation of *Prabhatham*. It should be specially mentioned that the group was able to help with party work later on by regularly contributing funds according to their means.

The success of the work at Bombay increased my desire

to tour Ceylon and thereafter, Singapore and Rangoon. I set out for Ceylon from Bombay. M. P. Damodaran, MLA was also with me to attend the Ceylon conference.

Ceylon Malayalees gave us a rousing reception. A public meeting was held the next day at Colombo Town Hall. Admission was by tickets. The hall was filled with Malayalees. I spoke on socialism. I dealt specially with the peasant movement in Kerala, the peasant struggles and the work of the Socialist Party. The town hall bore witness to the keenness of those Malayalees to hear public leaders from their country, especially those working for national freedom and socialism. The following day Damodaran spoke on Gandhi-ism.

The majority of Ceylon Malayalees are workers. They are mostly from Malabar, from Ponnani and more particularly from Nattika. There was also a small section of officers and middle class clerks.

Colombo is easily influenced by the political developments of Kerala. There is a constant traffic of people between Colombo and Kerala. There were socialists in Colombo as well as a small minority which was blindly hostile to them. But most people were either socialists or sympathisers.

The 'Ceylon Malayali Mahajana Sabha' was a well organised Malayalee association of Colombo. The Malayalees of Ceylon have gained much from the strength of this organisation. But some of its leaders tried to give it a communal colour. The Sabha did not involve itself in politics. It was a time when public workers had begun to wreck community organisations. A section of the youth started to boycott this organisation on the plea that its members were reactionaries.

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The revolutionary youth thus started an organisation called Bharatha Youth Sangham. It should be particularly noted that even in the face of differences of opinion, all its members worked unitedly in matters concerning Malayalees.

The young revolutionaries had no idea on how they should function. Politically, there was a great confusion of ideas among them. They disliked the policy followed by the Sinhalese towards the Indians of Ceylon and had no connections at all with the Sama Samaj Party which was the organisation of Ceylon's progressives. Besides, they had no ties with the small groups of Tamil youth. I thus arrived in Ceylon at a dangerous time.

Rather than collect funds for *Prabhatham*, I felt that my duty lay in trying to improve this dangerous state of affairs. I planned to work initially among the Malayalees themselves and to strengthen their organisation, to put them in touch with non-Malayalees and to set up a united organisation of all Indians, to associate this organisation with the Sama Samaj Party and to make them work in a united front. Although it was too difficult to accomplish such an ambitious mission in so short a time, I was able to lay the groundwork for it.

I arrived in Ceylon at a time when enmity towards Indians, and particularly Malayalees, had reached a climax. It was usual for Malayalees to be beaten and maltreated. Malayalees were generally referred to as *Kochiyans* in derogation. Most of the Malayalee labourers worked in Colombo. Sinhala-Malayalee enmity had reached its zenith here. The leader of this anti-Malayalee agitation was the labour leader Gunasinha. He had contested twice for the Ceylon State Council. Indians

and particularly Malayalees worked against him. He decided to stir up Sinhala-Malayalee enmity in retaliation. Gunasinha wrote in his paper that it was because of the presence of Indians that Sinhalese were not able to get jobs and that the unemployment problem could be solved by driving out the Indians, particularly the Malayalees. The poor unlettered Sinhala labourers believed this. They were angry that the Indians were living well when they themselves were starving.

There is a weaving mill at a place called Wellawatha. The mill owner was an Indian. About 500 labourers were working there. Most of them were Malayalees and Tamilians. Some Sinhalese also worked there. The Sama Samaj Party members controlled the mill union. There were Trotskyites in the Sama Samaj Party, but communists too. It was a small organisation of people of these two ideologies working among labourers and others. The Trotskyites broke away from the Sama Samaj Party when the war broke out and the communists formed the Communist Party. Anyway, when I arrived the Sama Samaj Party was an organisation of progressive Ceylonese. It provided good leadership to Indians and Ceylonese during the anti-Indian movement and campaigned against the movement. It had to undergo many difficulties because of this. I was able to get acquainted with the workers of this party and later on to get them to work on the basis of a uniform programme.

I was asked to speak at a meeting of the Wellawatha workers, which was even announced in newspapers. Gunasinha had written in his paper the previous day that I should not be allowed to speak and that I should be thrashed and driven

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away. We therefore felt that something untoward might happen. As somebody from our group started speaking, a group of Sinhalese ruffians started hooting. When I ascended the dais to speak, stoning started. The meeting broke up. The Malayalee workers were furious. They felt that their leader from their home-land had been insulted. They went in groups and thrashed the ruffians and chased them to their houses. The meeting was resumed thereafter and no further untoward incident occurred.

Gunasinha used to write plays about Malayalees and publish them in his paper. One of these was entitled *Veerayya*. It was about a Malayalee who enticed a Sinhala woman who used to visit his shop to buy provisions, married her and left her in destitution when he returned to Malabar. Its aim was to proclaim *Victory to the destruction of Malayalees*.

The plays used to be enacted publicly. I went to see a play staged on Vaisakha day. This was about a Malayalee named Sankaran who arrived in Ceylon in tatters, started a tea shop, married a Sinhala woman and finally became a pauper and was driven back to Malabar by his Sinhalese wife and children. *Let this be a lesson to Sinhalese*, it indirectly reiterated.

While walking through a place called Marudna one day, I found two Sinhalese chanting amidst a large crowd and selling something. I bought a news-sheet for 5 cents and had it read to me. It was a pamphlet that glaringly attacked the social practices, traditions, character and morality of Malayalees. They sang it even more objectionably than the printed version. *Sinhalese brothers. You have no work. You are starving. Open your eyes. Drive away the pariah Malayalees who snatch away your*

food. Only then will you be all right. Awake. Let the destruction of Malayalees be successful. This was the refrain of the song. On one or two occasions, Sinhalese children stoned and hooted me after they found out that I was a Malayalee.

After the Wellawatha stoning and other incidents, I wrote to some newspapers on the explosive situation in Ceylon as I found it and enunciated some measures to mitigate it. I pointed out that individual quarrels between Indians and Sinhalese had been given communal overtones and that letting this tendency grow unchecked was pregnant with terrible consequences. I sent copies of my article to the Governor and the Minister of Transport, Kothalawala. All newspapers, including the English daily Times of Ceylon published it and wrote editorials about it. Afterwards, I had an interview with the Police Commissioner at which I was asked to furnish evidence for what I had written. I complied. He assured me that such things would not happen in future and said that he would do the needful if I reported any future occurrence to him. It may be mentioned that subsequently there was a temporary lull in the persecution of Malayalees.

It was at this time that Transport Minister Kothalawala recommended the immediate retrenchment of 6,000 daily-rated Indian workers. This recommendation created a stir among Indians. Mammoth protest meetings were held about this and telegrams were sent to the Indian government and other interested quarters.

Unemployment is an international problem. It is not a Ceylonese problem or an Indian problem. No independent nation except Russia is free from this scourge. Very many

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unemployed Indians arrive daily in Ceylon. They are ready to work even on reduced wages. Unemployment is on the increase daily among Ceylonese too. The unemployment among Ceylonese is not going to end by retrenching 6,000 or even 60,000 Indians. It only means that for some time Indians will starve instead of Ceylonese. The temporary palliative that both Ceylonese and Indian leaders found for this was to share hunger and unemployment between their compatriots. This problem can only be solved by ending imperialist rule and by establishing a socialist government. All poverty-stricken people should be prepared for it and forge unity on that basis and fight against the common enemy. Both Indians and Ceylonese should understand this and act. I propagated these ideas and set up the appropriate organisational base.

I talked to the leaders of the Ceylon Malayali Mahajana Sabha. I told them that it was no use fanning the enmity of Malayalees against the Sinhalese just because some Sinhalese leaders were fomenting hatred of Malayalees among their followers. That it was necessary to work for a just compromise and that Congress help would be available for its furtherance, I gave notice of a resolution on Ceylon at the forthcoming AICC session.

Similarly, meetings were held under the auspices of the Sama Samaj Party. I spoke there. I did propaganda work on the basis of their resolution that no Indian who had been in Ceylon for five years should be sent back and that they should have the same rights of franchise and civil liberties as Ceylonese and that those who had lived in Ceylon for less than that period should return in the common interest. This

resolution was satisfactory to a section of Indians.

I talked, besides, to Ceylon Indian leaders like Desai, Tamil labour leaders like Natesa Iyer and people like Vaidyanatha Iyer and requested them not to consider their own interests alone but to arrive at a decision on the basis of the interests of Indians as a whole.

I talked also to Tamilian youths and to Aziz, who is now Secretary of the Ceylon Indian Congress. I asked them to bring together the small organisations being formed by Malayalees and Tamilians and to set up a central organisation working for the common needs of Indians as a whole. A committee was formed on this basis. It was after this that the Ceylon Indian Congress was started.

I conducted political classes and formed small groups among Malayalees who were socialists and socialist sympathisers. I conducted public and group meetings in areas where Malayalees predominated. I drew up a plan for future work. I toured Kandy, Ratnamala and other places and set up unions of estate workers. The anti-Indian movement had not spread to the interior. Indian and Sinhalese labourers lived like brothers there. I talked to the workers after a public meeting. A Sinhala worker told me: *Are we not all workers? Don't we suffer alike? Are not our demands the same? Why then should we hate each other? If we remain divided, the capitalist gains. Not we, sure.*

I was invited to speak at the Jaffna Youth Congress meeting. In a long speech, I dealt with the problems of Ceylonese Indians, possible solutions to their problems and the part that youth could play in them. I was introduced to Sama Samaj Party men and Malayalee comrades. I made arrange-

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ments for the political education of Malayalee comrades. I specially remember the help of Comrade Sankaran, who was a *Prabhatham* agent, and of Comrades Madhavan and Krishnan. Velai, Kunjiraman and others also assisted as Malayalee Association workers.

I was not able to do full justice to the work of enlisting subscribers for *Prabhatham* and of collecting donations, but I did lay the groundwork for it. After that, the youth of Ceylon kept in touch with the Party and helped it regularly.

I wanted to go to Singapore from Ceylon. Comrade M. S. Devadas, who was later to become the editor of *Deshabhimani*, was at that time in Singapore as lecturer in some college. He was known as Babu. Babu wanted to have me in Singapore but he was not sure how much financial support I would get. The Malayalees of Malaya were wanting in political consciousness at that time. They did not even have a strong organisation for themselves. Their only concern was to draw a fat salary and live sumptuously. They did not even think of the land of their birth and the culture of that land. They were not at all affected by the wind of freedom blowing around them in the world. But there were a few young people who followed the happenings in India and the world through newspapers and books. They were touched by these happenings, but at the same time were dejected because they did not know what to do. Babu who was held in affectionate regard by all Malayalees, was keen to come to India and participate in the struggle here. That was why he resigned and came even before I left Singapore. I personally felt that he should not resign, but should stay on there permanently. But his coming has meant

a great gain for the Party.

Using Babu's influence, arrangements were made for a reception by the Singapore Malayalee Samajam. The paper *Kerala Bandhu* wrote an editorial. This angered CID authorities. They intimidated Malayalee leaders who withdrew in fear. Babu was called and intimidated. When Babu said that I was coming only to raise funds and that there might be trouble if the government stood in the way, the CID Superintendent agreed to let me in. I thus arrived in Singapore.

It had been my first long journey by steamer. I made many blunders during the journey out of inexperience. I was not able to use a knife and fork to eat Western food. I was sitting one evening on the ship's deck. It was the lounge of the first and second class passengers. By 7 o'clock people began dancing. A European lady invited me to dance. She took hold of my hand. I was bewildered. I said I did not know how to dance. She made fun of me. She insisted. I took refuge in my room. I did not leave my room at dance time on any other occasion for fear of embarrassment. But by the time I made my second trip in a ship—while travelling from Singapore to Rangoon—I learned everything. I danced with a young lady and as a result was considered fashionable!

While in the ship I had pondered over India and world happenings. I saw signs of an imperialist war breaking out in the near future. I was afraid that I might not return to India in time to participate in it. I was enthused by the political conference of Bakkalam and the preparations made by the Party for the coming struggle against war. I was pained by the anti-Soviet line of the CSP and its decrepit organisation.

I felt that it was time for me to say goodbye to the CSP. I feared the repercussions the anti-Soviet attitude of Masani and Co. would have on the Congress Socialist Party.

Singapore was a hot-bed of CID men. There were many Malayalee CID officers there. I was then living with Babu. A CID Inspector was living downstairs. I had to be specially careful in the beginning not to indulge in any agitation, keeping myself engaged solely in raising funds for *Prabhatham*, and while talking to individuals.

Fellow Malayalees gave me money, moved not so much by political awareness, as by personal trust and their fraternal feelings towards a fellow Malayalee. Most of the youth were in high spirits consequent on the victory of Subhas Chandra Bose in the election the Congress President's Office. They believed that India would achieve freedom under the leadership of Subhas Bose. They were dissatisfied with the Socialist Party for having adopted a neutral attitude at Tripura. It was usual with me to engage in debates with politically conscious youth and to talk to individuals.

The government had made public a Labour Bill to elicit public opinion. With Babu's help, I wrote a critique on the Bill and sent it to newspapers. The papers gave it wide publicity. Afterwards, the Indian Association invited me to give a talk. I first addressed the Singapore Indian Association on the Labour Bill. This was an organisation of Indian officials and elite. The workers and the poor were barred from it. I was subsequently viewed suspiciously by all Indians there and by Malayalees in particular. The police surveillance also intensified.

IN THE CAUSE OF THE PEOPLE

I spent nearly three months collecting funds and in talking about political matters to those donating money. The only public work that I did during this time was a speech I made at the Malayalee Association. After the fund-collection at Singapore, I toured Johore, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh and Penang and came into contact with many Malayalees and Chinese.

I started making a careful study of conditions in Malaya, the Indians in Malaya, Chinese and Chinese workers. The Chinese were the first colonisers to emigrate to Malaya. They constitute a majority of the emigrant population. Merchants and hawkers were chiefly Chinese. Muslims from Malabar lived as small traders and pan-shop owners. There were nearly 10,000 such Muslim workers in Singapore city alone. Among estate workers, 60 percent were Tamilians, 35 percent Chinese and the remaining 5 percent Malayalees. I was amazed at the national spirit of the Chinese and their unstinted loyalty to their country.

There were nearly 8,000 rickshaw workers in Singapore. They had a strong union. They had struck work just before I landed in Singapore. They wanted an increase in wages as a war against Japan had broken out in China and they wanted to donate to the war relief fund. The strike was successful. Each rickshaw puller contributed 30 cents (12 annas) a month to the relief fund.

I talked to a rickshaw puller one day with the help of another person. I asked him whether he was helping in the war effort. The question angered him as though it was a reflection on his patriotism. He replied: *I do give 12 annas per*

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month. Work or no work, I pay this from what is left after paying the vehicle's hire. I spend only the balance. He said this with a smile.

Along with their love for China, they had a high regard for the Indian National Congress. They knew well the two leaders *Kanthi* and *Neru*. While going in a rickshaw one day, I started talking to a Chinese individual. The rickshaw man asked the friend who was with me who I was. He said I was *Kanthi* and *Nehru's man*. The rickshaw man was glad. He spoke warmly about Nehru's visit to China and his stay with the Chiang Kaishek. I paid the fare on reaching our destination. He did not take it. *Are we not one?* he replied. He accepted the fare after I pressed him and laughed happily and went away glancing backwards every now and again.

There were well-organised groups among Chinese workers and students. Each estate had its own union of Chinese workers. Sometimes they used to conduct struggles separately for their demands. To my question why they did not join other workers, they replied that Indian workers lacked unity and a union sense.

The natives of Malaya are Muslims. They are peaceful and good-natured. One section were peasants and the others policemen and soldiers. They wanted to live without working too hard. They are content if they own a cycle and have money for a movie ticket now and again. It took me three months to get into touch with the Malayan Communist Party. The Communist Party was the best organised party in Malaya. But it was not free to undertake any public activities. Many party leaders were undergoing imprisonment at the very time when

I was there. They worked most secretly. They built up a strong underground (Secret) Organisation. They undertook trade union work and all other activities in this manner. They had many worker and student-volunteers. There was an Indian on their committee. By my association with a solitary party leader, I was able to learn many things organisationally.

The Malayalees of the Singapore naval base organised a public meeting after I got into touch with Malayalee compatriots. 10,000 Malayalees worked in this naval base. Many of them had participated in the political struggles of 1930–32. Some had also participated in the Travancore State Congress struggle. I remember specially the great help that I received from Travancoreans. On the initiative of the youth of the naval base, a meeting of Malayalees was held. The proprietor of the cinema hall gave the hall rent-free for the meeting and also donated 10 dollars. The procession, carrying the national flag, was larger by far than any that had been held before, except one during a visit by Nehru. I was thrilled at the sight of the national flag. I had the happiness of an Indian who sees his flag outside India. There were 5,000 people at the meeting. K. P. Kesava Menon presided. I spoke for two hours. They gave me a purse of 500 rupees. Non-Malayalee Indians, like Tamilians, also started paying attention to me afterwards.

From fund collection, I slowly started taking interest in political work. The CID chief was angry. Babu by this time had left for home after resigning his job. I spoke under the auspices of the Indian Association at Malacca, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and other places. I had talks with the Indian Government's agent. I explained to him the condition of Indian

workers. I spoke also at meetings of railway workers.

I still remember something that happened while I was in Singapore. Malayalee workers of an estate near Johore came to know of my visit and my plans from English newspapers and from the Malayalam weekly *Kerala Bandhu*. Some of them had come to Malaya after participating in peasant and workers struggles and losing their jobs in the process. They raised funds from among workers of that and surrounding estates. Their leaders went around not knowing where to find me. They finally met me after a great deal of effort. The leaders told me that they had raised some funds and that I should go to the estate to receive it and talk to them about trade unions. I felt very happy. I went there. I understood the difference between workers who sincerely volunteer to help in the work for their class and the middle class who donate 5 dollars with a sad smile even when approached in their houses.

I went to the estate. About 100 faces eager to know about their land and their worker-peasant brethren at home appeared there. I talked to them about the activities in Kerala. They donated 100 dollars (150 rupees). They did not leave me. Even when I took leave of them, they stood watching me. Their eyes showed how loyal they were to their country, its people and their class. Some shed tears. This was an electrifying experience. How many workers are there who live in misery in foreign countries unable even to have one meal a day, and still cherish the hope that their country will become free and they will one day be able to work and live there happily. Even meeting Indian leaders who were fighting

for freedom was a tremendous experience for them.

There was another amusing incident. There was a coal mine in Malacca. It belonged to a European. There were many Malayalees from Travancore working there. They wished to see me and talk to me. But there would have been trouble if the Manager had come to know that I was a Congressman and a trade union worker. They played a trick. They told the Manager that an Indian musician was coming for a concert and asked him for permission to listen to him. The Manager gave permission. I arrived there at the appointed time. A harmonium and other instruments were ready. I sang a song. There was another singer also. In between I spoke to them. I spoke about the Travancore struggle and the political activities in Kerala. They presented me with the money they had collected. A rather unique music concert! There was a co-worker from Kunjimangalam working in that mine.

It was at this time that I got acquainted with Comrade R. H. Nathan who was later deported from Singapore and held as a detainee prisoner in Vellore Central Jail. We mapped plans for a union for estate workers. We held meetings of workers at Port Swettenham, Clang and other places. We set up a trade union at Clang. Comrade Nathan was extradited on this account. The police keenly watched me and Comrade Nathan. As I was able to create a stir among the Chinese also, the police commissioner called me and warned me not to conduct meetings outside the hall referred to earlier. He was sorry that I had been admitted at all into Malaya.

There was in Singapore a youth league of Indians and Chinese. Its office bearers were Tamilian youths. I was invited

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to preside at its annual conference. I was at that time in Ipoh. I arrived for the meeting along with a procession of volunteers from the Singapore railway station. I was thrilled when I saw Indian policemen and soldiers paying homage to the national flag. I felt jealous of the patriotism of Indians living abroad. 30,000 people attended the meeting. A large section were Chinese youth. There were people of various countries and religions. I made a rousing speech. I strongly attacked fascism and imperialism. Some officials began leaving the meeting in fear, and I guessed what was going to happen. I was prepared for that. I had been able to stir up the enthusiasm of the entire audience.

At about the same time, I wrote in Chinese newspapers of the need for the Chinese and Indians to come together and work jointly. I described the role of the Indian National Congress in the struggle of China against Japan. I was able, after this press statement and the youth league conference, to get acquainted with worker-leaders and leaders of the Chinese student movement, and to work along with them.

The war began. I was asked to leave Malaya. I was warned against speaking at public meetings. I yearned to get back to India as soon as possible in order to attend the Wardha AICC meeting and to participate in the forthcoming struggle. But I wasn't able to get a passage in the ship. Deciding to travel via Rangoon, I set out.

I had written to the Rangoon Malayalee Samajam before leaving. They had replied, welcoming my visit. The first to arrive to welcome me upon reaching Rangoon were Malayalee CID officials. When the war started, their harassment became

unbearable.

I spent about a month in Burma, staying in Rangoon most of the time. I spoke at two or three public meetings under the auspices of the Rangoon Malayalee Samajam. I spoke also at a large public meeting at the Rangoon Town Hall. Some of the leaders of Rangoon were at this meeting. I impressed on my hearers that the Burmese and Indians should not fight against each other, but should jointly crush the common enemies: fascism and imperialism. All Rangoon newspapers published details of my tour and wrote editorials on it.

The situation in Rangoon was similar to that in Ceylon. Some of the Indians were money-lenders and rich Chettiers. Business sites and buildings belonged to them. Even some of the Ministers of Rangoon owed them money. Most of the rickshaw-pullers and other workers came from Andhra and Orissa. There was a large population of Malabar Muslims there. There were also Malayalees of the middle class working as clerks. The leaders of the people were Buddhist priests called Ponjis. They had a nasty habit of butchering people in the name of the Buddha. These monks killed a lot of people when riots broke out between the Burmese and Indians.

There was a revolutionary group there known as Thakin's Party which had connections with the Indian Communist Party. I met the leaders of this group and travelled with them. I presided at the meeting of the Rangoon University students and spoke at one or two peasants' meetings. We were able to organise Indian and Burmese peasants against the oppression of an Indian landlord and wrest some concessions after a minor struggle. I was able to assist Thakin's Party in this

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struggle and to put them in touch with Indians.

The workers and students of Burma grew up as two mighty revolutionary forces. The strike of the oil-field workers of Burma, their departure, and the sympathetic strike launched by students and the subsequent firing are incidents that will not fail to inspire anyone. But Thakin's Party did not have at that time the political maturity that comes from intelligent leadership.

I received felicitations and purses from Malayalee hotel workers and shop owners before I left. In my anxiety to return to India I had not paid much attention to my itinerary in Burma. My trip was useful in that I could raise some money and also think in an international perspective and meet local leaders and workers.

My ship sped through the Hooghly river on its way to Calcutta. I had left home eight months earlier and did not know what had happened during this period. I believed that the Party and patriots in Kerala might have made enough preparation for the struggle against the war which had already started.

The purpose of the First World War was to make preparations for another world war. Imperialist forces had made sufficient preparation for that at the time. But the progress of the Soviet Union and its five-year plans brought together and enthused the revolutionary forces of the world. And by their agitations and organised power, the people also got ready to establish a popular government in each country in the coming struggle against imperialist overlordship. The opportunity for that was near at hand. I was glad that I was back in India

in time for the struggle.

The ship berthed at the Calcutta harbour. I knew some of the activists in Calcutta. But as I was new to Calcutta, I did not know how to get in touch with them. I was worried.

It was then that I found that CID officials are sometimes useful after all. I found a CID Inspector dressed in ordinary Bengali attire running to and fro in confusion. I was standing outside my room. He approached me meekly and said: *Please do me a favour. A person named A. K. Gopalan is travelling in this ship. Do you know him?* I asked him why he wanted him. He replied: *He is a Congressman. He left India. We have word from Rangoon that he is coming in this ship, and that we should take him into custody.* I decided to have fun. I pointed out a passenger who had struck me as hot-tempered to the Inspector. The Inspector turned to him and asked whether he was A. K. Gopalan. He lost his temper and thundered at the Inspector for a full five minutes. The Inspector was disappointed and started running again. Finally I called the Inspector and told him that I was the man he was looking for. I delivered all my luggage to him. He called a taxi and took me to a hotel. I contacted my friends from there afterwards.

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I spent about ten days in Calcutta. I occupied myself with studying the happenings in India during the months I had been away. I felt that India would play a great role in the changes taking place all over the world. I felt too that if the Indian National Congress failed to provide leadership based on a well conceived policy, there might be cleavages in the ranks of nationalists, and the nationalist movement itself might disintegrate, leading to collapse of the nationalist organisation. As I thought of the statement made by Mahatmaji immediately after the war started, I felt sceptical of the ability of the Congress to provide such a leadership. Nevertheless, I arrived in Wardha a day before the AICC was scheduled to begin with great hopes and keen to hold discussions with leaders of the various groups.

Comrade Subrahmania Sarma who was a member of the AICC had also arrived in Wardha a day prior to the meeting. We held discussions with Socialist leaders as well as Communist leaders. We could sense the trend of opinion among Congress leaders.

As expected, the Wardha AICC failed to provide proper

leadership. The Wardha resolution marked the beginning of naked bargaining. Was Britain's war a just war? If not, were we supposed to participate in it at a price? The Congress leadership did not worry itself with such questions. It was not on this basis that the Congress leadership framed its war policy. That was why some Congressmen later regarded even the term *people's war* as meaningless, no matter how much it was explained to them.

But the Wardha AICC session did in a way bring out publicly the hatred that Indians had for fascism. The Congress proclaimed that inviting the Japanese to help fight for India's freedom would be treasonable and suicidal.

Gandhiji's initial statement was that Britain should be helped unconditionally. Gandhiji argued that it was not right to harass the enemy when he was in difficulties and that it was unfair to use that opportunity to bargain with him. But this was not acceptable to the Congress Working Committee members. They were afraid of the mass feeling against war. Out of consideration also for the interests of the capitalist class, they were constrained to abandon the policy of unconditionally supporting Britain. The resolutions and happenings that came later on until August 8, 1942 indicate clearly the great danger and disaster that befell the nationalist organisation.

The Second World War broke out as a tug of war between the major imperialist powers for dividing the world among themselves once again. It was a graphic illustration of the quarrels that tend to break out as a result of the conflicts among the capitalist classes. The mission of the people in this

war was to mobilise the entire populace in the fight against imperialism and fascism and the fight for the independence of each nation. What was needed therefore was to oppose this war unreservedly and to wage a mighty struggle against it under the leadership of the mass organisations that had emerged in India. The Wardha AICC session did not provide the leadership for such a struggle. Had a mass struggle against the imperialist war been launched, the preparations made by the people would have prevented the disasters that subsequently overtook the country.

Most dangerous was the policy of the Congress Socialist Party leadership. That leadership came out in its true colours only after the start of the second imperialist war. It buried itself in its own grave after first casting itself adrift from socialism and later from the Congress Party itself. It was after the Wardha AICC session that I was convinced of the correctness of my earlier opinion about the origin of the CSP, its activities until 1939 and the policies it adopted after the war began. When the war began, the CSP decided that it was an imperialist war and that it should be opposed. But it did not try to collaborate with the Communist Party and other leftist parties and attempt to draw the Congress into the field of agitation. It only wanted to stage demonstrations against war and its economic ill-effects under its own leadership, keeping the Congress out. When we, the Kerala delegates, talked to Comrade Jayaprakash immediately after the Wardha AICC session, he told us that we should send at least 10,000 people to jail. Some anonymous leaflets carrying this idea and an issue of the socialist paper had been distributed at the AICC

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session. Some badges with the imprint *I oppose war* were also brought for distribution. But this pettifogging nonsense had to be stopped. Congress Socialist Party members from several states made it quite clear that they did not agree with this programme. Moreover, Nehru did not approve of it either. Finally CSP leaders agreed to drop it.

I was convinced that it was time to say goodbye to the CSP. I ruminated over its past history and decided that I should thoroughly re-examine my own role in the freedom struggle on the basis of my past experience, at a time when I must embark on a new chapter in my political life, taking into consideration the not inconsiderable theoretical knowledge that I had so far gained. My experience and knowledge of various parties in countries outside India like Ceylon, Burma and Malaya helped me greatly in coming to a decision.

The Congress Socialist Party was formed by a section of Congressmen who had functioned for a long time under Gandhian leadership and participated in its struggles. The fact that a heterogeneous group comprising peasants, intellectuals and individuals of the urban middle class were attracted to socialism was an illustration of the success of the great October revolution spearheaded by the working class of Russia under the leadership of the Bolshevik party. They were satisfied with the efficacy of fundamental Marxist revolutionary tactics and did not become Marxists out of any theoretical conviction or practical experience.

The CSP was not a party rooted in the class war of Marxism; its origin was not in class war but in nationalist war. Members of the CSP did not accept the principle that a so-

cialist party was a party of the working class. This could be seen from Jayaprakash's statement at the 1934 Bombay session of the AICC that the Socialist Party was a party of many classes. It was not understood at all that they were not merely revolutionaries, but representatives of a class. Instead of lining up all nationalists, including Congressmen, under working class leadership in the struggle against imperialism, they tried to keep socialists pinned down under the leadership of the capitalist class. They did not realise that the *bourgeois-democratic* struggle would only succeed under the leadership of a strong and organised working class party. They did not understand that only such a party would be able to ally itself with all classes in the struggle against imperialism and forge a united front. They forgot also that only an independent revolutionary workers' party can achieve this. That was why, instead of an independent revolutionary party, Jayaprakash and his associates set up a *socialist party* that was a hanger-on of the capitalist class.

Moreover, I knew from my own personal experience the weakness resulting from the absence of a proper party organisation in the CSP. In fact, apart from a conference held annually and three or four committee meetings every year, there was no organisation to speak of. Keeping in touch with lower units, getting reports from them, and generally guiding them, which are the pre-requisites of efficient party functioning, did not exist. There was no secretariat to frame a programme on the basis of the reports from lower units, nor a leadership capable of making lower units function systematically. Except for busybodies who shuttled through the country without any

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political ideology or programme at all, there were no proper party organisers or agitators. The agitators toured the whole country making fiery speeches, but did not make any attempt at all to build up an organisation to implement the policy they so vigorously propounded. Nor did they realise that an organisation was necessary. There was no system of training or educating activists from below. Even the party newspaper gave no systematic directives to its correspondents and agents. In short, the CSP organisation was one in which each worked according to his fancy, at a time of his choice and without any system. Lenin's words, *The organisation cannot be built up without a revolutionary and correct policy; without organisation it is not possible to propagate the policy*, were very relevant to the CSP's bankrupt policy and organisation.

Masani and Co., resigned from the Working Committee of the CSP in 1939. They wrote articles against the Soviet Union not only in the Congress' socialist paper but even in capitalist papers, worked against the Communist Party in league with other parties and tried to create a split in the Trade Union Congress.

After the start of the second imperialist war, the CSP ceased to have anything to do with socialism and the policies of the working class in the international context. Not realising the importance of the Soviet-German provisional treaty, they opposed it as a Nazi alliance. The Red Army's entry into Poland was criticised as evidence of Soviet imperialism. The CSP leaders who prided themselves on being Marxists failed to see even what Churchill, the principal enemy of the Soviet Union, saw. Moreover, they followed a policy of breaking up

class organisations and struggles. They created a split in the All-India Students' Federation, the All-India Kisan Sabha and the Bihar Kisan Sabha.

Instead of setting up a secret organisation, necessitated by the war conditions, they snapped all ties with Communists and threw out all those known to be Communists from the Socialist Party. As a result of this, people like me who had risen from the ranks of the nationalist struggle and joined the CSP got closer to Communism and the leaders remained with Gandhi-ism. The socialist parties of Malabar, Tamil Nadu, Orissa and other places started functioning as units of the Communist Party.

I set out for Malabar after the Wardha AICC session. I travelled unknown to the police. I presented myself at the historic meeting of the party workers at Pinarayi. Comrades Krishna Pillai, Namboodiripad and others attended the meeting. It was decided that the socialist party of Kerala should work as a unit of the Communist Party. No one in the Working Committee disagreed with this. It could be quite clearly seen then that this was the unanimous opinion of party workers. There was discussion on the future programme and how to coordinate the activities of the secret organisation and public work. It was decided that some of us would have to work secretly and others in public.

As there had been a Summons pending against me for two years in Kerala, the Party wanted me to go and work in Tamil Nadu. As a result I went to Tamil Nadu and started working semi-legally there, though in Kerala I was a wanted man.

I first worked among the workers of Golden Rock,

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Trichinopoly. What was the then condition of the South Indian Railway Union? The stagnation and lull following the 1923 strike had not disappeared completely. Disunity and distrust were rampant among trade union workers. The rivalry between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, Congressmen and Justice Party men showed itself in union work. On one side, there was debate on whether or not the Congress flag should be displayed in union general body meetings; on the other, there was rancour over the union's properties. We were able to organise all these sections under the Red Flag and to convince them that they could help the nationalist struggle only by organising themselves on a class basis. Small study classes were held. The formation of some of the important workers of the SIR(South Indian Railway) union which is today providing leadership to trade unions in South India and laying the groundwork for conversion of the union itself into such a revolutionary organisation were indeed great achievements.

What was the condition in Tamil Nadu? On account of the misguided policies of the CSP, Comrade Sreenivasa Rao and others were imprisoned for long terms for speeches they made after the AICC session. Only Comrades Ghatte and Ramamoorthy were still free. Even they did not have facilities for large scale activities.

The Party asked me to work in Trichinopoly. I worked there with the help of Comrade Kalyanasundaram who was leader of the Southern Railway workers. Some cells of the party were formed there and study classes held. We felt that coaching and training of activists was urgently required.

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Comrade Sarma was there with me. From Malabar came Comrades Ramachandra Nedungadi, Raghava Marar and others.

To begin with, a training class with 15 volunteers was opened at a place not far from Trichinopoly. Sarma was in charge of coaching them while Raghava Marar was in charge of physical training. This camp greatly enthused Congress workers and the people living there. There was a cotton mill close to the camp. The volunteers held a public meeting close to it. Activists from among the mill-workers attended the camp and classes.

Thus, the basis was laid for a trade union. The volunteers received practical training on how to form a trade union in a new place. This union became strong and in three months staged a strike for their minimum needs. The volunteers trained at this camp were sent to many places in Trichinopoly district and were able to set up trade unions and peasant unions and to hold coaching classes for party workers. They held classes and did party work in Kulithalai, Karur and other places.

We were strongly convinced of the need for such camps. A camp was organised at Muthupetta in Tanjore District. 30 party workers attended it. Comrade Ramachandran was in charge.

Madurai was a big centre of Congress work. About 15,000 workers worked in the Harvey Mill alone. Even before the war, the Party had functioned there among workers. Facilities existed, therefore, for the establishment of a well-organised camp. I toured Madurai district along with Comrade Chel-

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layya and decided to open a big camp there. A camp was opened at Thirupparamkunram near Madurai. 50 persons were trained there. Comrade Sarma conducted the classes. Comrade Ramamoorthy was also available for advice. But I had to go underground even before the end of the camp. We had received reliable reports of my impending arrest.

These camps not only trained nationalist workers for the forthcoming struggle, but also created an environment in which CSP workers and Congressmen, who had hitherto engaged themselves in mutual recrimination and non-cooperation, could work in unison. It was possible to have Gandhi-ist Vaidyanatha Iyer, PCC president Kumaraswamy Raja, Kamaraja Nadar, Ramamoorthy and Chellayya working together in the same field. The camps were also able to create a united front against imperialism. All sections of the Congress Party provided money and assistance for this. Many non-socialist Congressmen attended the Tanjore camp.

I started a new life. From being a *Satyagrahi*, a socialist and a dedicated public worker always willing to court imprisonment I had to switch-over to underground work. I was not at all used to secret work. I had till then always worked in the public eye. I could not even keep things hidden in my mind. My training all along had been to speak the plain truth to everyone. Scurrying from one end of the country to another, speaking at big meetings, participating in general strikes and peasant struggles, rushing wherever the baton was seen and to receive blows and abuse from policemen, to go to jail, to create opportunities for going to jail if there were none, to

engineer *lathi charges* and clashes even there—this was my political regimen. I never used to read books and newspapers. I couldn't find the time. I had not realised that to find time to learn and to study was itself a part of Party work. Leaders had not taught me; they too had had no such experience. This was the CSP heritage. Until I went underground I had not remained quiet or free for a single day. From such a life I was about to enter a new regimen—to remain quiet, to read and learn, to do only what was necessary, to meet only those people suggested by the Party, to stay aloof from the public and to keep at arm's length from the police—this was my new pattern of life.

I was very happy and eager to enter into this new regimen. But I was not sure how long I could carry on like this. There was no alternative. Anyway, I decided to wage a struggle against my traditional pattern of life. I understood how terribly difficult the new life and activities would be. My health had been ruined as a result of years of wandering and starvation, as a result of police brutality and imprisonment. Despite this I was still ready to suffer further hardships. It was a question of either shouldering all these hardships and doing something for the country and the people or getting caught by the imperialist police, courting imprisonment and renouncing public work—there was no other alternative before me. I knew only too well the pleasures and hardships of jail life. I was familiar with the conditions that prevailed in all categories of jails from 'A' class to 'C' class. If sacrifice and patriotism are measured by the number of times one has gone to jail I could say with certainty that I was not inconsequent

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among Kerala's *Satyagrahis* and patriots. But that was not the important thing now.

To put us in jail away from the public eye was imperialism's need; to avoid arrest and to work was ours. To keep us safely in jail after having imprisoned us was imperialism's aim. It was necessary for its continuance. To bide our time and to get out of it and to get back to work was our duty. Until 1938 I had yearned to go to jail. Now a time had come when I yearned even more strongly to avoid going to jail and to work underground. I had found from long experience that it was meaningless to try to achieve freedom by courting arrest. I found the very act of working underground to be a struggle against imperialism. The very system of offering rewards of five hundred or one thousand rupees and sending CID men all over the country in search of those who were underground was part of the execution of the official plan: *Shut them up in jail: Save imperialism.*

But I was quite new to this secret life. How to adapt myself to it? Could I do it? I strongly suspected that I might fail. Anyway, I started working underground.

I went into hiding on March 1, 1940. To live in an isolated place and to work in contact with towns—this was my understanding of underground life. It took me two years to master the art of establishing secret organisations and putting them to constructive work. I suffered a lot in the first six months until I learnt the rudiments of how secret organisations function. It was a time of harassment and arrest by police and spies, and prison brutalities. I felt that the place was filled with CID agents. If I saw somebody for the first

time, I would conclude that he was a CID agent looking for me. While travelling in train or bus, I would look around in fear. I thus had to spend many days without shelter, without food and imbibing nothing but water. When accommodation was obtained, I still starved for want of money. It was not enough to learn how to live underground; one's co-workers also had to be taught. They had to be taught not to divulge confidential matters to others in excitement or excess of enthusiasm. Moreover, the people at large also had to be briefed. Otherwise, there might be trouble. If a new person came, the people of the house thought he was a CID man. They felt that it was dangerous for us to stay there and I also began to sense danger. Sometimes, one would have to move three or four times a day. Those accompanying us had to be specially briefed. They had to be instructed on how they should walk, dress and talk.

I suffered greatly before I trained myself in these things. Rapid training was never easy in the miserable circumstances in which we lived. There were days when I slept on river banks. I have chanted hymns to Rama in wayside inns. I have acted as the assistant of temple priests. I have eaten with the Brahmins near the Chidambaram temple. With 2½ annas, I have lived sumptuously for four days. I have slept on pavements. I have lived on water and bananas alone. I have cut my feet walking at night in darkness. I have saved myself from being accidentally bitten by snakes on many occasions. Nevertheless, there was a joy and happiness and self-satisfaction in this, One's life was led amidst the people. I was participating as far as was possible in the freedom struggle. I could annoy

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and browbeat officials. That was reason enough for happiness and self-satisfaction.

I was glad when I discovered how ready the people were to protect us and to undergo any sacrifice for that. They were happy over this new type of activity. They felt that this was just the type of work that was needed against imperialism that oppressed and dominated them. They respected and loved those who worked underground.

I started gaining experience in this new form of activity. From each mistake I made and experience I gained I learned something new.

The police knew next to nothing about the secret organisation. While in Madurai, I learned one day that a policeman was found standing outside the Meenakshi temple with my photograph, watching people passing by to see if I was among them. This was how clever policemen set about trying to arrest those who were underground.

An interesting incident occurred one day while I was travelling by bus near Pattukotta in Tanjore District. The bus came to a stop in front of the police station. Four uniformed policemen emerged from the station and walked towards it. I was very upset since this was an early experience in my career with the underground. I got down and walked briskly away. The way I left aroused police suspicion. They followed me. We had a race on the road. I did a few things in self-defence when I reached an isolated place. Some stones greeted them. After a little while, I found myself alone. I vanished into a nearby jungle immediately. I walked through the jungle for two days and finally managed to reach my destination.

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On another occasion, I was walking along a street near the Meenakshi temple at four o'clock in the morning. I immediately spotted a CID officer whom I knew, approaching me from the opposite direction. He had his head covered with a piece of cloth. There were brothels on both sides of the street. I boldly decided that it was better to have recourse to a prostitute than fall into the hands of the police and go to jail. I stepped without hesitation into a house that *decent people* do not even glance at. *Come, sit. A girl has arrived from the village. A new one.* I was welcomed thus by a pale human figure who had taken to prostitution out of poverty. I glanced outside, dropped 4 annas into the hands of that ghost and jumped outside before the policeman could return. That ghost followed me saying *What, what is this for; please stay. A good one has arrived from the village.* I was ashamed of myself. She felt that I had made some mistake, and that she had earned 4 annas without working for it, and that I was an inexperienced country bumpkin. Anyway, I saved myself from her clutches. I have avoided that lane ever since, not out of fear of the policeman, but out of fear of that ghost. While trying to avoid dangers, I have plunged myself into such awkward situations. There is one consolation however. Whatever be the disgrace, I have not fallen into the imperialist net.

The agitation and campaign against war went on in Kerala without slackening. The entire people including peasants and workers were ready for a mighty struggle at the behest of the Congress. Congress committees made preparations for it. They campaigned to persuade the Congress leadership to accept a mass struggle programme and were successful in

this.

September 15, 1940 is an important date in the political history of Kerala. The Kerala Congress Committee framed a programme to activate the masses who had become impatient over the Congress failure to give well-directed leadership for a struggle against the sufferings caused by war and against the terrible oppression of the time. It was decided that September 15 should be observed as anti-repression day. On that day it was shown that the peasants and workers of Kerala were ready to fight, not only for their day to day needs, but also against imperialism. They decided to violate the ban in case the protest day was prohibited. They showed that they were even ready for a clash with the police if necessary. Protest meetings were held at Morazha, Mattannoof, Tellicherry, Calicut and Cannanore. The police tried to prevent them. There was firing at Tellicherry. Two comrades, Abu and Chathukutty, sacrificed their lives for freedom. At Morazha, a mob infuriated by police atrocities clashed with sub-Inspector Kutty Krishna Menon who was notorious for his cruelty. The sub-Inspector and a constable were somehow killed. There was a clash between the public and the police at Mattannoor too.

There was a general change in the political atmosphere. The government had not realised the readiness of the Kerala people to brave all repression. Police forces and MSP (Malabar Special Police) were let loose. Police searches were launched at Kallyasserry and its environments. A country-wide hunt for comrade KPR started. A reward of 500 rupees was offered to informants.

Anybody resembling KPR was arrested. There is an in-

teresting story about this. It seems a certain Brahmin was mistaken for KPR and arrested at the Mangalore railway station. He had a large moustache similar to that of KPR. The poor Brahmin was astounded on being told that he was under arrest. His dhoti began slipping down. When he placed his hand at his hip to hold it, the policemen thought he was about to take out his revolver. They fled. The Brahmin now full of courage went his way. This is just one example of the bravery of these heroes who flaunt guns, spears and swords and attack the people in large groups.

The police and troops held route marches at Mattannoor and many places in Malabar. They started beating people in their homes. Women were molested. All those known as Party members were arrested. The repression unleashed against Communists at that time by the police was unprecedented in the history of Kerala's national movement. A small section of Congressmen were scared. They went about dissociating themselves from the movement.

The important activists had all to go underground. Many including KPR went underground. Some were arrested and prosecuted. Finally, KPR was also arrested. The High Court sentenced him to death. But on account of the people's agitation, his life was spared.

It was only after September 15 that the Party realised the necessity for a strong underground organisation. Many went underground. To protect these activities, the party leadership started examining and studying this new organisation. The All-India party leadership gave the necessary help for this, allowing a large section of activists to go underground after

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September 15. The Party educated them on how they should conduct themselves.

Investigations were intensified after this against revolutionaries like me who had gone underground in the early days. The government deputed a large CID force for the task. Comrade Krishna Pillai was arrested on the border of Travancore. Comrades Mohan Sarma, C. Subramaniam, Keraleeyan, Ramamoorthy and others were arrested at Madras. They were prosecuted on a conspiracy charge. Comrade N. C. Shekhar and company were arrested at Coimbatore and another conspiracy case was initiated. Comrade Ramachandra Nedungadi and others were arrested at Tirunelveli and a third conspiracy case was instituted. Thus conspiracy cases and other repressive measures were launched on a large scale. Suspects were taken to jail and subjected to third degree methods. Some information was elicited from those who cracked under brutal questioning. Attempts were made to intimidate some activists and turn them into spies. Some were made police witnesses. This made underground work extremely difficult. However, the work was continued despite the great difficulties that had to be faced.

Finally, on March 24, 1941, I was arrested at Trichinopoly. I was staying at the house of a student of Trichinopoly college. The police surrounded me one night at 3 o'clock while I was sleeping in the attic of the house. As I opened my eyes, I found myself surrounded by a group of uniformed and plainclothes (CID) men, Inspectors and others. There were some dressed in police uniform. I saw that the spies had succeeded. I was very sad. Anyway, I told myself that nothing could be done

this time to avert imprisonment.

I was taken to Cantonment Police Station after a search of the house. Many CID men came to have a look at me. They began talking to me informally and casually asked me about the whereabouts of Comrades Namboodiripad, Sundarayya and others. Finding it fruitless, they gave up. The next day, I was taken from there under a large police escort, and with my hands chained— like a performing monkey being led by its master.

After my arrest, the head constable who was the leader of the police party which had escorted me to jail, came near the room where I had been locked up and stared at me for a long time. He then started weeping. He was an aged Muslim. I asked him why he was crying. He replied: *I am old. I will retire in one year. I have to marry five daughters. Please save me.* He wept again after saying this. I understood what he meant. I made him understand that I would not cause him any trouble. Poor man! He wanted only to live and to marry his children off. Did he want to harass the people? Surely not. He was afraid that I might run away from jail.

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I was taken afterwards to the large ward of the detenue camp in Vellore jail. K. P. Gopalan, K. Damodaran and others were there. I was transferred the next day to another. I was taken to where K. Madhava Menon, Sambamoorthy and others were lodged. Special wardens kept watch over me even inside the jail. I felt that I was being watched all the time either by the Warden or by one of the ordinary prisoners. Anyway, I decided that I should not stay there for long. I started thinking of and working out schemes to this end.

It was at this time that detenue prisoners were divided into classes. It was ordered that 'B' class prisoners should be provided the same kind of food as ordinary 'C' class prisoners. The prisoners had already decided to fast against this decision.

Wherever they are, Communists will work unitedly and systematically. Even in jail they had been able to form themselves into an organisation. Even non-Communist Congressmen were happy about this. A commune of the detenues; an elected working committee for it; a Mayor elected by them—this was the nature of the organisation. A group of people to enquire about things like diet every week; a com-

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mune meeting to discuss and decide on special matters; a commissar for each department: postal commissar, bazaar commissar, food commissar and such others, each responsible for the duties falling within his purview.

A commune meeting was held upon receipt of the order on class division. The Superintendent was given a memorandum. We gave notice that if the order was not withdrawn, we were even ready to go on fast. A week passed after the fast began. But still the government did not budge. Outside the jail, a mighty agitation was going on. The prisoners continued the fast with determination. Some found it difficult to carry on. Except for four or five, all others were determined that the fast should continue regardless of the consequences. The prison authorities did everything possible to stop it. The fast went on for 18 days. I lost consciousness on the 15th day. I was hospitalised. I was pressed to eat. But I did not pay heed. The fast was ended on the 18th day on an assurance that the original facilities would be allowed. Gandhi-ist prisoners did not join in this fast. But their ration was also increased. They received that happily. We had fasted for 18 days on a diet of water only.

After the fast, I was transferred from the detenue camp as a convicted prisoner. I was sentenced ex-parte to 2 months imprisonment for contempt of court. I was put among *Satyagrahi* Congressmen. There were about 150 *Satyagrahi* prisoners. I was prohibited from speaking to them. But I did not obey this injunction.

I talked individually to the *Satyagrahis* and gave them classes in small groups. I helped them to live an ordered jail

life and introduced them to commune existence. Through such activities, I was able to convince many of them that the policy of the Communist party was correct. I found life here pleasanter than that in the detenue camp.

After two months, I was again branded a detenue and lodged among first class prisoners. I was among Malayalee prisoners like Kozhippuram and Abdul Rahiman Sahib and comrades Balachandra Menon, P. K. Balan and Narayanan Kutty Menon. We formed a Communist group. I was Secretary of the group. Its work was to consider matters pertaining to jail life. Classes were held twice daily under the leadership of Dr. K. B. Krishna. These proved very useful.

Bread and coffee in the morning; at noon, full meals with ghee, curd and all; tea and tiffin at three o'clock; at seven in the evening, a full meal with meat; and finally a cup of milk at bed-time comprised the detenue menu. Each prisoner had a chair, an easy chair, a table, a shelf, a mattress, a pillow and four sheets. Every four or five prisoners had a servant (an ordinary prisoner) and linen. Weekly laundering, reading room, radio (could be used individually), tennis, volley ball, a bath twice daily, a feast on festive occasions, occasional dramatic performances, music concerts, made up our everyday living. A detenue could use personal funds upto ten rupees monthly. He could buy cigarettes and other necessities with that.

I did not find this life happy. The Wardens annoyed me very much. They spied on my meetings and talks with others, which greatly annoyed me. A time came when a clash with the wardens became inevitable. We clashed not only with Wardens but with the Superintendent as well.

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We found a report in the newspapers of June 23 that Hitler had repudiated his non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union and that the Germans were marching into Russia. This was a historic development that could change the very history of the world. We discussed it. Each one of us brooded over it individually. Group discussions were held. Because of want of proper information from outside, we could not fully assess the importance of the development. Some argued that there was a change in the course of the war and, therefore, the party should change its policy. The majority decided that there was to be no change.

Meetings and debates were held daily. Comrades like Dr. K. B. Krishna, P. K. Balan and Balachandra Menon and I argued that there was a change. But we could not convince others. Comrades K. Damodaran, Chandroth and Kachampadi Satyanarayana opposed our view. These arguments went on until we started quarrelling and shouting at each other. Anyway, this became a subject of constant discussion. Each one tried to read newspapers regularly and to understand the Party's policy. Each one started thinking for himself and examining the opinion of others.

What worried us most of all then was the police hunt following the *Kayyoor development*. We found that a regular police *raj* was in operation in Kasaragod *taluk*. This was the second witchhunt after September 15. We realised how much this was hampering activities outside and how much the people were suffering. This was one of the reasons that prompted me to escape from jail.

I felt it was essential that I escape from jail at this crucial

time for the Party. Without waiting for help from others, I started planning and working out a plan on my own. Later I sought the help of Pattabhi Ramayya, a comrade from Andhra. We conferred very calmly and drew up plans. On September 25, 1941, the deputy jailor came to tell me that I and Dr. K. B. Krishna were being transferred. I felt that they were going to keep us somewhere in solitary confinement. Other detinue prisoners felt sorry that I was leaving. An Andhra comrade called Chenchayya who, though old, was young in spirit, organised a farewell get-together and feast. Congress leaders Kaleswara Rao and Sambamoorthy spoke.

Chief among my well-wishers were Sambamoorthy and, Kaleswara Rao. We had been in jail together on several occasions since 1930. Sambamoorthy was a young man. He would join any group with which he shared common interests, political differences notwithstanding. In speech he was frank and straightforward. Sambamoorthy used to call me *Doctor of the underground*.

Kaleswara Rao was a coward. He said one thing, but had something else in his mind. Out of cowardice he wouldn't speak his mind plainly. He had a keen desire for leadership. He was one of those affected most by the anti-Communist myopia. Still, on the face of it he was my friend! One of the things that made him pretend to be my friend was his fear that I was short-tempered. He was a fly in the ointment among Congress leaders.

Jail authorities had told me to be ready by 6 o'clock in the morning. I bade farewell to all and went to sleep. There was pitch darkness and heavy rainfall. As the others started

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sleeping, my friend and I started taking the preliminary steps for escape. The rain was a great help. I had already acquired an iron pole, chisel and other appliances. We started using them. We mercilessly attacked the wall that separated the people from Congressmen, Communists and other nationalists who were prepared to fight against fascism. Each blow we dealt to the granite was a blow against the repression of officialdom and their terrible manhunt. I decided that the hole in this wall and the stones lying there would be my present to the officials coming the next morning with guns and *lathis* to remove me to another jail. I did not gloss over the hardships I would have to suffer outside. There would be a regular man-hunt. The jungles and hills would be filled with troops. I was penniless. But whatever the consequences, I was determined to escape. I am a Bolshevik and belong to the group of comrades who have the guts, intelligence and courage to achieve their ends; get out I would.

I saw the poor warden dozing with a drooping head and a lantern nearby. The god of sleep was evidently victorious in a fight that lasted until 2 o'clock. Poor man; what would be his fate the next day? Fines! Punishment. The Warden would be punished for my misdemeanour.

By 2 o'clock, a hole big enough for one person to pass through had been made. I peeped out of the hole muttering to myself *let imperialism be damned, long live the Freedom struggle*. We were eager to get out although it was pitch dark and raining outside. I felt that Mother India was shedding tears of joy to welcome her beloved children who, piercing jail walls, were coming to rejoin the struggle to break the bonds of slavery.

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Those tears moistened our heated brains. As though nature too wanted to help us, she flashed electric torches of lightning so that we wouldn't go astray in the darkness or encounter other pitfalls. Even nature was against imperialist greed and repression!

We challenged imperialism. Where are your troops and police, jail Wardens and thick walls and CID officers? Discard at least now your delusion that you can thwart man's spirit of freedom with guns and swords and stone walls. We have a weapon that vanquishes all these: unalloyed patriotism and love for the working class. We will serve the people, no matter whether we starve or die. I will try not to step inside the cursed jail walls any more. If possible, I will smash these walls and set the prisoners free. With these thoughts we bade the jail walls farewell.

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Around 3 o'clock at night, in torrential rain, we bade farewell to the jail walls and came out. As we emerged from the hole, we found the warden sitting about 50 yards away in good light with his revolver. Small sounds were inaudible in the sound of the rain. That was a blessing. Reaching the fence meant crawling slowly through the jail garden. If something went wrong, all our efforts would have been fruitless. We would have had to go back to jail again in the morning. I boldly crawled through the garden and warned those behind me not to make any noise and to be careful. We crawled for about half a furlong and reached the barbed wire fence. We jumped over it in darkness and cut our legs and bellies in the hurry. Everyone jumped out in the same way. C. Kannan, who was the last to jump, had his blanket caught in the fence. I was afraid that it might serve as a clue by which we might be traced.

Torrential rain, accompanied by thunder and lightning. The lightning was a blessing to us. We started running along the banks of fields. Every now and again one of us would tumble down, and fall into the mud below. Whatever hap-

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pened, we wanted to run at least 10 miles and escape. With daybreak, the police would start their hunt. Falling into the mud and getting up we travelled tortuously in the darkness. We were running aimlessly. After running for three miles, we saw a bright light in the distance. It was then that we understood that we had wandered and wandered and inadvertently come back to the jail locality. We were terrified. It was now 5 o'clock. Only an hour more for daylight. What could we do in such a short time? Throwing all caution to the winds, we ran straight on. By daybreak we were near a lake. Our clothes were covered all over with mud. One of us had sprained his leg because of repeated falls. Our bodies were aching from tip to toe, and were numbed by rain water. Our clothes were all drenched. Only a couple of dry clothes remained in our hold-all. We washed ourselves and changed our clothes. We kept the ones we required and buried the rest. We retained a watch and a fountain pen we had. Two of us dressed like officers and the others like clerks. We decided to travel in daylight and take refuge in the woods nearby. Five persons walking like that might attract the attention of the police and arouse the suspicion of the public, but we proceeded since we had no other alternative. As I knew the people it was I who spoke to them. We entered a jungle after walking continuously for two hours. As we were very tired, we spread out wet clothes to dry and rested there.

What had happened in the jail in the meantime? When the count was taken at five o'clock, five people were found missing. The Wardens blew their whistles. There was an uproar throughout the jail. The Superintendent came running.

The jail authorities discovered the hole in the jail wall. The first thing the Superintendent said on hearing the news was *Has A. K. Gopalan gone?* Police officers arrived. The blanket hanging from the barbed wire was found. The policemen who walked through the field found out in which direction we had escaped. Policemen on foot, policemen on motor cycles, policemen in trains and buses, house to house searches in Vellore town—the entire town was filled with policemen. A posse of reserve policemen set out to comb the forests near the town with the aid of police dogs. The police were sure that they would be able to apprehend us by scouring a radius of 10 miles of the jail. The police Superintendent vowed that we would be back in the jail by the next morning.

As for friends still in jail, they entertained mixed feelings. *It is good that they went like that; they are vainglorious*—so thought Sambamoorthy and Co. *What troubles these people will cause us. Traitors. Let them be arrested soon.* So felt some others. Communist detainee prisoners were happy. But they were afraid that we might fall into the hands of the police as we had escaped without any preparation. We learnt of these varied reactions a few months after our escape. At the time we were resting in the forest unaware of these occurrences in the jail and among the police. Although tired, sleep eluded me. The other four lay fatigued on the grass. On me fell the responsibility of taking them all home without our being arrested. The responsibility kept me awake. No money and no wherewithal for food. Three of us had to reach Andhra, and two Kerala. How many miles to be trudged. The police hunt would be harrowing. How long would it take to elude it

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and make contact with the Party. What was to be done in the event of illness? I barely slept with these thoughts running through my mind. I had a plan. I had noted the address of a bootlegger who had been with me in jail. I had kept it with me very carefully in a small container. He had been very kind to me. I too had greatly helped him. He would remember that. Anyway I resolved to get in touch with him. I decided to proceed in this matter without taking my comrades into confidence.

I was so famished and thirsty that I could not get to my feet. It was then that a woman driving some goats saw us. She felt pity at our condition and asked: *Who are you? Why do you stay in this forest?* Immediately, Pattabhi, who was among us, said: We have run away from the army. It is very miserable there. We ran away because we could no longer endure it. It proved to be a well-aimed shot. That woman's son was himself in the army. She used to receive letters from him occasionally. She thus felt a great sympathy for us. We told her that we were thirsty. She walked away immediately with her goats saying that she would be back presently. We had asked for water out of hunger and thirst. But this too was not safe. If she told others about us, the public might come to investigate. Our presence would thus be advertised. The police would know immediately. We were all afraid. We even thought of leaving before the woman returned, but then decided that that might mean compounding our blunder, and so sat there ready for the worst. She returned after 45 minutes. She brought kanji water with a few grains of rice floating in it. We drank it greedily and bade her goodbye.

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Come, let's go somewhere, let's discover what's what, and as I said this, I began walking waving the plan I held in my hands. We walked through the forest and reached a small hamlet after an hour. There were many people there looking after sheep. I asked an old lady if Lakshmanan was there. She wanted to know who we were and where we were coming from. I told her. She understood. She said she would go and call Lakshmanan. She returned presently with her son. He embraced me in delight. How happy he was to see me. *Well, we shall talk later. Let's go home.* Saying this we accompanied him. He lived in the next village. He was one of the well-to-do of that village. He had his own farm, cattle and bullock cart. We were all given warm water for a wash, which was very pleasant. In the meantime, a steaming meal was ready, which we ate ravenously. Lakshmanan thought we had been released from jail. We asked him for five rupees and a bullock cart to travel in. He gave the money immediately and sent his son with the cart. We travelled along the road the whole night in it. Before daybreak we halted at a certain place and entered the woods nearby. We then began the second day of our jungle trek. We had with us five rupees, a watch, a fountain pen and a good blanket. We were thus fairly well-off. But where could we get food and whom should we contact for that. This worried us.

We walked through the forest the whole day. At one o'clock we were so famished that we could not proceed. We drank to the last drop some dirty fly-infested water that we found in the bed of a rock. How delicious it tasted! How we enjoyed it! We spent the night in the forest.

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We continued the journey the next night. We decided to enter a village close to the forest in the morning. We did so and said that we wanted food and would pay anything for it. Finding that we were tired and would pay anything, the man we approached asked for five rupees. Five rupees for him—yes, we agreed. We had five rupees with us. We ate with gusto and rested a little while and then re-entered the forest.

We were sorry that we had exhausted our funds. We started walking again. One of us started running a temperature. What were we to do? We put up for the night at a roadside inn. It was difficult to get food unless one paid for it. We found a way to raise funds. We decided to dispose of our blanket and watch for what they would fetch. While trekking through the forest, we saw a large village at a distance which we approached. There was a large house there. One of us was sent there with the watch and blanket. It was actually an ashram of the Ramakrishna Mission. The watch and blanket were sold there for five rupees. They paid only five rupees because they knew that our man was hard up for money. Anyway it made us happy. That night we entered the road from the jungle. There were many bullock carts on the road. We were allowed to travel in one of them which was carrying bags of rice at a charge of two rupees. We clambered over the rice bags and slept soundly. Before day-break we left the cart and the road. We could not proceed an inch further without having something to eat. The only thing to be had was the dirty water in the jungle.

We boldly entered a village. There was a house at some small distance. We entered it and claiming to be deserters,

and asked for some food. They wanted one rupee for a meal. We promised them everything we had and were able to have a good meal.

How many more days of walking remained? How to continue the journey? For twelve days we had been walking sleepless and hungry. Our bodies ached all over. We were all completely fatigued and worn out. Two of us had to reach Kerala and three the Godavari district of Andhra. We decided to keep walking until we got in touch with the Party.

After two days we reached a certain place. There we changed our clothes and went to the station. But the train had left a minute before. I lingered disconsolately at the station. Then a woman spotted me. She was a hawker. She knew the station officers. She said a goods train was due and she would get us on it. With her help we succeeded in boarding the goods train and were allowed to remain in the guard's room. At long last we were in Kerala once more.

It took me some days after reaching Kerala to get in touch with the Party. I was to realise later that the circumstances in those days were unpropitious for underground work in Kerala. It was difficult to establish shelters and the network of contacts necessary for such work. As I was well known to all, it was still more difficult to keep me incognito. Nobody was able to visualise the consequences of my apprehension. At this juncture I contracted typhoid and was gravely ill. Everyone thought that I would die. I escaped death only because of the dedicated efforts of the physicians who attended on me.

I have nothing to say to those who believe that it was cowardly to escape from jail. The life of a first class detainee

prisoner bears no comparison at all with the life that we subsequently led outside jail. On one side, there was bread, butter, *sambhar*, meat, milk, sumptuous feasts, radio and tennis; on the other, hunger, disease, despair, rotten food, harassment by spies, lack of freedom, days devoid of light and breeze, nights devoid of sleep, long journeys, and numberless other travails—which of these would a coward or a pleasure-seeker choose? Which of these would a revolutionary choose? This is something that the reader must decide. My second phase of underground life was to be even more horrible than the first. I had come out of jail fully aware that it would be so.

Once I recovered, I was once again able to undertake active party work. At about this time, Comrades EMS and P. Krishna Pillai were also released. Cases against all leading workers except myself were withdrawn. Many approached the government and pressed for the withdrawal of the charges against me too, but with no success. The Home Department of the Government of India was of the opinion that I was too dangerous a person to be released and so declined to comply. As all other leaders were at liberty, work proceeded normally and as I remained the only one who could not work openly, the Party felt that it would be better for me to stay away from Kerala for a while. In accordance with this decision, I left for North India towards the end of 1942.

It was early 1943. I was then staying in Kanpur. Many remarkable things happened during my stay there. My companion at that time was a person called Bada Babu. He was a prominent person of that locality and a very rich man. He was introduced to me by one of my friends. I was working

as an agent of a calendar company of Jhansi and sub-agent of an insurance agent. I would return to Bada Babu's residence after my morning rounds. He was very interested in me as he found in me a poor young man striving earnestly to make both ends meet. I made just enough money to keep myself alive. I devoted the rest of my time to Party work.

I knew almost all the offices and shops in that town. I had called there several times. I knew how the rich people and merchants of that place treated human beings and how they broke their word without any compunction. I myself began experiencing the trickery and deceit one encounters in everyday life and began to realise the difficulties that an insurance agent has to face in his work. How many of us are insensitive to the difficulties and miseries of others. Not many realise that many people who go about well-dressed and put on an air of respectability before others actually live in want and misery. Or is it that they don't even dare to admit to themselves the extent of their miseries? I had to walk four miles to reach the town from my quarters. This alone meant eight miles by foot per day. In addition, I had to walk an equal distance in the town on my rounds. I had to survive somehow and make enough to pay my Party contribution. I also had to participate along with other members in processions and public meetings. Anyway, I did not allow myself to be overwhelmed by the difficulties that faced me.

They said one day at Bada Babu's house: *Mr. Nair, we shall go fishing tomorrow. The District Magistrate and Police Superintendent are coming. You should also come. We can fish and have a good meal with the catch.* As it was impossible to

decline, I agreed.

I went shopping the same evening and bought myself two new sets of clothes. I polished my shoes. I borrowed a good tie. I set out next morning decked out in these. At Bada Babu's everyone was ready. We went fishing and bagged a good catch. I took part in all they did and won their regard. While parting, they shook hands with me and thanked me for my company. My heart missed a beat as they shook hands with me. I wondered to myself, *Where would I be if they knew who I was!* But I played my part well, and took leave of them as their bosom companion.

I spent a few more months there and then left for another town in West Bengal. There was a brick factory about 12 miles away from the town. I was appointed its Manager on a salary of 150 rupees a month. Duty hours were from seven in the morning to seven in the evening. There was a lunch break of one hour. My work consisted of supervising the workers and keeping count of bricks transported on military lorries. I lodged and boarded at a hut close to the factory. The food served was execrable. My employers were Gujaratis. I did my work faithfully. It was wartime. Corruption and nepotism were rampant. One of the drivers told me one day: *Sahib, there are 20 lorries. You will be paid ten rupees daily for each lorry. You will thus earn 200 rupees a day. All you have to do is to issue a receipt for eleven lorries for every ten lorries that actually come.* Refusing to oblige him, I reported the matter to the owner. The workers became my enemies from that day. They started abusing me in Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi etc. *This Madras Babu is crazy. Is it not madness to refuse 200 rupees a day? Why did he*

come here at all? This was how they talked. They even decided to agitate against me.

There were many women working there. As they were very poorly paid, they complained to me. I talked to the owners, but to no effect. I told their leader that they should be prepared to go on strike as a last resort. After a week, they went on strike. There was much commotion. When the owner questioned them, one of them said: *It is that Madras Babu who prompted us.* The owners fumed with rage against me. But the workers got a rise and developed an attachment to me from that day. Some of them brought me presents on their way to work in the morning. Although annoyed first they were happy later on that, despite my hard life, I had refused to accept a bribe or act dishonestly. They realised too that I was an ally of workers.

But I felt, after this change, that I could not work there long. I was tired out working in the scorching day-long sun. I had to set apart some time in the night for Party work too. Many of our workers had come out of hiding by then; so I had not much to do. My prime work was to elude the police. I left that place before long.

I have described here some important aspects of life underground for it was my lot for several years.

Before long, the time for elections came. The Communist Party decided to participate in the election and field candidates. The police felt that I would speak at some place in Kerala on the day the Party announced its candidates. They were ready with their net in Calicut. Policemen were not only kept ready for action at Calicut, but in Cannanore, Tellicherry,

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Palghat and other places as well. They thought they would earn a big reward if they got hold of somebody who had been on the *wanted* list for as long as four or five years. Among them were policemen who were fed up after searching for me in all possible places for so long without success.

A meeting was going on at a place near Perintalmanna. Comrades E. P. Gopalan and Kunjunny Nair were there. A large crowd had gathered for the meeting. I emerged with a small trunk when someone was speaking and sat there. No one noticed my identity but they all stared at me. The crowd started murmuring. E. P. asked me to speak. *I am A. K. Gopalan wanted by the police...*, I began. The people rose in their seats as one man crying *Jai, Jai*. The police started running hither and thither. They did not know what to do. Finally, the Inspector came and said hesitantly that I was under arrest. The people were furious and started shouting that they would not surrender me. Unfortunately the Inspector was an old student of mine. I pacified them and accompanied the Inspector to the Perintalmanna police station. After two days, they released me. I was once again among the people. I went first to the Calicut Office. A good building and a press had been acquired there by the Party, not with Russian money, but money donated by the people. E. M. S. alone gave 75,000 rupees. Many others also donated varying sums. The people's money. The people's party. A press obtained by the people and the public workers who campaign and toil in their interest. I felt proud of myself. Hundreds of politically mature workers had been drawn to the Party. They wanted to educate themselves and to develop. They were going forward on a new basis, building

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the foundations of a Marxist party. I saw the beginnings of the development of the Communist Party into a genuine mass party. I was glad to see such a development taking place.

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The Second World War was over in August, 1945. Atomic bombs were used against Hiroshima on the 6th and against Nagasaki two days later. About 300,000 people were annihilated as a result. The peoples of the world were enraged over the use of the atom bomb. The United States had assumed a position of strength dictated by the supreme power of the atom bomb. The United Nations was inaugurated then in San Francisco, and a Labour Government came into power in Britain.

Members of the Congress Working Committee were released in June. The British Government made an official announcement on June 14 assuring Indians that an interim national Government would be formed.

A new stir and enthusiasm spread throughout the country as a result of this announcement. The masses were excited by the move for freedom. New nations were emerging at this juncture out of the debris of the old imperialist system. Britain, the greatest imperial power, was reduced to second-rate status after the Second World War. Britain realised that it was no longer possible to beat back the nationalist movement

that was growing from strength to strength. They came to the conclusion that the only way out was a truce with the well-to-do in India—the vested interests. Nevertheless, even the new Labour Government did not desist from the old policy of bargaining, vacillation and deferment in the matter of India's freedom. The Congress leadership was at the same time alarmed by the upsurge among the politicised masses whose political awakening they themselves had helped to foster. Now, on the one hand, they tried to pour cold water over the growing spirit of the masses and on the other to play up this same spirit before the British Government as a means of intimidating it and grasping the reins of power. The mass movement forged ahead in disregard of the open opposition of the Congress and League leadership. The successful outcome of the war gave a new life to India.

I was released from jail towards the end of 1945. I was re-arrested that same day, but released once more two days later. Election campaigning was in progress everywhere. Kelappan and the Congress were strongly campaigning against the Communist Party. I was the Party's candidate at Calicut. The Congress candidate was Dr. Chandu. A bizarre incident occurred during the campaign. A drunken man set up by some Congress friends darted at me with a drawn knife. The people seized him as he neared the dais. Following this, the government ordered me and some others to furnish personal bonds. The idea was to annoy us with court hearings during election time. The case was however rejected by the court.

Communist meetings used to draw large crowds. It appeared from the strength of the demonstrations and meetings

that the Communists would win. Some officials whom our workers approached in their offices for canvassing said: *We know that of the two candidates A. K. Gopalan is far better than Sri Chandu. But you should let us vote Congress this time because of our sympathies for that organisation. Next time we will vote for you.* This actually happened. Dr. Chandu was elected to the Assembly from Calicut. But after five years the people nurtured an antipathy for the Congress. The Congress suffered a miserable defeat in 1951. People like Kelappan who opposed Communists in 1946, forged a united front with the Communists in 1951 to oppose the Congress. The Congress won only four assembly seats and one parliament seat from Malabar.

The anti-imperialist struggle reached new heights by 1946. The historic naval agitation took place in February. 20,000 naval ratings started a revolt against the British Government. In many places members of the infantry also joined them. Events that recalled the naval revolt of 1905 in the Russian ship Potemkin took place in India.

As the revolt of the armed forces spread and a new awakening manifested itself among the masses who had already forged ahead in disregard to the opposition of Congress and League leaders, our independence movement underwent a change for the better and took a decisive turn. The Communist Party was responsible for this change and was actually the driving force behind it. The Communist Party was in the forefront of the forces that effectively worked to dispel the frustration felt by the people on account of the lukewarm policies of the Congress-League leadership. The intensity of

the country-wide movement for this change from the quietist policies of the Congress and League to the dynamic leadership of the Communist Party was demonstrated by the release of the INA prisoners. It was a great achievement which not even the August 1942 Resolution had been able to bring about. Hindus and Muslims fighting jointly against British rule became a general feature of the immediate post-war period.

From British warships echoed slogans like *Jai Hind*, *Inquilab Zindabad*, *Hindus and Muslims are one*, and *Death to British Imperialism*. The armed forces created by the British rule levelled their guns not against the people but against the British themselves. The Indian people courageously stalled the British overlords in their plans to massacre the navy men. The working class of Bombay lined up behind this struggle. They staged a historic general strike. British troops butchered 238 of those brave freedom fighters in the streets of Bombay. The naval mutiny and the mass movement that spread like wild-fire all over the country in its wake shook the Attlee government and forced it to parley with the Indian *bourgeoisie*. A settlement was arrived at with this class. They felt that only transfer of power would protect their own and the Indian *bourgeoisie's* interests. They realised only too well that the growing mass movement in India would develop into a serious threat if not repressed. The naval mutiny began on February 18. The very next day, Attlee announced that a cabinet mission would be sent to hold negotiations with Indian leaders.

Instead of exhorting the people to hasten British withdrawal and to deal even deadlier blows to British imperialism,

the Congress at this time openly worked against mass struggles. Congress President Azad's statement on the naval strike is a typical example of this. He said: *The strikes and hartals and violations of the law now going on in the country against the government are all misplaced. Nothing has happened to justify a clash with foreign rulers who function as the interim government.*

The anti-struggle attitude of the Congress leadership strengthened Muslim communalism no less than the hands of the British. A fascination for parleys and a dread of mass struggles. No wonder that negotiations from such a position failed. The failure of the Simla conference of June can only be considered in this perspective. But the struggles of the Indian people remained largely unaffected by this attitude. Workers, peasants and the subjects of the native states took to the path of agitation in larger numbers than ever before. In the princely states freedom struggles became more and more intense in a manner never before experienced. There were turbulent mass agitations at that time in Travancore, Hyderabad, Mysore and other places.

In this atmosphere of mass agitation, the Muslim League observed a struggle day in August under British persuasion, exploiting fully the pacifist attitude of the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha stirred up communal feelings in reply to this. Making use of the anti-agitation policy of the Congress, Imperialism cleverly used its policy of *divide and rule* even at that eleventh hour. Instead of working for the victory of the anti-imperialist struggle, as also of the mass movement that was getting stronger day by day, the Congress leadership finally showed itself ready to form an interim government

in league with the communalist lackeys of imperialism. The Congress and League leaderships clashed with each other in this interim government. The summit talks held in London in December between Attlee, Wavell, Jinnah and Nehru thus ended in failure. A Congress ministry under Prakasam's leadership was formed in Madras in mid-1946. The Prakasam ministry did everything in its power to repress mass struggles, but workers were nonetheless successful in staging historic struggles in Madurai, Coimbatore, Vikramasingapuram and Golden Rock. There were police firings in all these places. Many were arrested, including Assembly Member Anandan Nambiar. His aged mother had her arm broken in a police *lathi-charge*.

The oppressed classes conducted struggles against their privations throughout India. The Communist Party took the initiative in providing leadership for these struggles. Workers conducted struggles in sympathy with the RIN mutiny. A struggle lasting three months had to be waged later against the dismissal of the workers who had struck work. Peasants were seething with discontent. They agitated for land and against food shortages. Mighty protest demonstrations were carried out when Prakasam visited Malabar. A demonstration that shook the whole of Cannanore was held on that day. Intense agitation against royal rule and the Dewan's administration took place in Travancore-Cochin. The agitation assumed a new dimension with Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Tyer's proclamation of American-model administrative reforms. These reforms were intended to perpetuate monarchical rule and the Dewan's administration. The Congress leadership was

willing to give this a trial. But the Communist Party and the working class were not prepared for such an experiment. They presented the government with a charter of 26 demands, including an end to the Dewan's administration and the introduction of popular rule. The cunning Dewan knew that so long as this attitude prevailed among the working class, he would be unable to put the reforms into practice. He invited leaders like T. V. Thomas and C.K Karunakara Panikkar for talks. They were informed that all the demands of the workers would be conceded except termination of the Dewan's rule and introduction of popular government. But they were not ready to accept anything less than responsible government. The truce talks failed and a General Strike was declared in Alleppey in October. The workers of Alleppey had launched a political strike for the first time. Even before the strike, C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer had unleashed repression in the whole of Ambalapuzha and Shertallay *taluks*. Trespasses, rapes and police witch-hunts became the order of the day. The situation worsened with the declaration of the strike. Atrocities surpassing the Fascists in their ferocity were perpetrated with the support of the capitalist-landlord tie-up. Incidents that made everyone's blood boil. Wives, mothers and sisters were raped in the presence of their menfolk who were kept tied to pillars—there were no limits to their depravity. With no choice in the matter, the working class began to resist. The reserve troops and workers clashed at Punnapara on Oct. 24, 1946. Workers and police died alike. On the 27th there was terrible slaughter at Wayalar. An unarmed mob was machine-gunned. More than 300 people died in the massacre. The

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Congress leadership interpreted this resistance as a Communist insurrection. Instead of organising struggles in other places along with those of Ambalapuzha and Shertallay, they sided with CP in an effort to isolate Communists. That brave struggle was thus temporarily suppressed.

The *beedi* and cigar workers of southern Karnataka had launched a prolonged strike at about the same time. Peasants formed unions in the eastern regions. There were firings at Kavumpayi and Karivellore. A Communist man-hunt was started after this on the ground that a peasant revolution had begun in Chirakkal taluk. Large scale man-hunts began in the eastern regions of Chirakkal taluk. The house of the peasant-leader Thaliyan Raman Nambiar was set on fire. There were lootings and rapes on a large scale. Such inhuman cruelties had been witnessed in the past only during the Malabar rebellion of 1921. The Prakasam ministry tried in various ways to crush the Communist Party in Malabar. MSP men were posted in all villages of North Malabar where the peasant movement was strong. The MSP even arrested teachers.

It was a time of acute food shortage. Black-marketing was rampant. A food meeting was held in the Calicut Town Hall under Comrade EMS's Presidentship. The *Desabhimani* newspaper was first published in January 1944. At about the same time KPR and the other defendants of the Morazha case were released.

I was at this time Secretary of the Kerala Communist Party. Even after the election great struggles were rearing their heads. There was a railway strike and a postal strike.

Comrade EMS wrote an article in *Desabhimani* entitled

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Call and warning. I spoke accordingly in a meeting at Ernad. I arrested while returning. EMS was arrested at the same time. We were released later on bail. Krishna Pillai was banished to Travancore.

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There were mass struggles throughout the length and breadth of India in the months of January and February, 1947. The struggles were gaining momentum as time passed. 1,950 Communists were arrested early in 1947 with the help of the Congress and League leadership. Many were held in custody without trial. The rulers in London began to see that the people of India were no longer prepared to tolerate British rule. The Congress-League leadership did not want to smash that rule *in toto*. On the other hand, they were prepared to clamp down on the mass movement that had boosted them to power and to work for a truce with the rulers of the princely states who were supporters of imperialism.

With the growth of the mass struggle, non-gazetted government employees struck work for the first time in history. Officials like magistrates and *tahsildars* were arrested and jailed. The leftist parties and more particularly the Communist Party brought to the fore at this time the question of national freedom and mobilised the people against any truce with the British. As a result of all this, Attlee was obliged to say in February 1947 that Indians would

be granted self-government on or before June 1948. The Mountbatten scheme was made public in June. Pakistan came into being on August 14 and India on August 15, 1947. It was the League in Pakistan and Congress in India that came to power. Had the working class possessed decisive influence in 1947, India's future history would have taken quite a different course.

Another important development took place at the same time. In the princely states the popular movement was raging like a storm. Great struggles were organised in Mysore, Travancore-Cochin, Indore, Hyderabad and other places.

There was a widespread agitation in Malabar against black-marketeering and hoarding. The Prakasam government started an undeclared war against the Communist Party. It was at this time that *Desabhimani* was restarted with the help of the public. Some 25,000 copies a day used to be sold then. The government wanted to silence *Desabhimani* on some pretext or other. They demanded a security of 10,000 rupees. The paper had to be suspended for 1½ months. But the people contributed not 10,000 rupees but a sum in excess of that to *Desabhimani* and the paper was started again.

Although I ceased to work underground and appeared in public in 1946, the government did not want me to even resume activities which were legal. They wanted to put me in jail on some trumped-up charge or other. By March 1946, therefore, many cases had been registered against me. The first of these was that I had tried to foster anti-government feelings in the police force. I was sentenced to six months imprisonment. I appealed and was released on bail. Two

other cases followed soon afterwards. These were for various speeches that I had made. Finally I was sentenced to five years for the crime of intimidating Head Constable Ananthan Kurup. I filed an appeal at the High Court applying for bail. The High Court granted bail. The condition stipulated was that I should report in Malabar on the day of the hearing and leave the same day. I came for the hearing one day but could not return the same day. While returning the next morning, I was arrested again at Calicut railway station for breach of promise. I filed an appeal once again and was released on bail. I was released the second time by the Madras High Court on condition that I should not enter Malabar except on the day of the hearing. The bail was allowed by Justice Govinda Menon. My sureties were, as before, C. M. C. Nambiar and Puthalath Raman. The police registered cases against them and harassed them greatly. Nevertheless these friends stood by me until the end regardless of the consequences. I shall always be grateful to them for this.

In the meantime, there was another important development. It was the time of the Palliam *Satyagraha*. Violent attacks, arrests and *lathi charges* were taking place. I had to enroll volunteers for the *Satyagraha* and provide other assistance. I came down to Trichur and took some Namboodiri women studying there and four or five others to participate in the *Satyagraha*. The news that Namboodiri women were going to offer *Satyagraha* the next day spread like wild-fire. I and some of the Namboodiri women spoke that evening at a big public meeting. We got word that troops were coming from Trichur that night to arrest me. After consultations with

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the Party I managed to leave the Trichur border that very night, walking, running and travelling in canoes.

The Namboodiri women went for the next day's *Satyagraha*. The police *lathi-charged* them. Savithri and Priyadatha were beaten most severely. This created a new stir in the whole state. There was a mass upsurge against police atrocities everywhere. There was a clash between the police and the people and Comrade A. G. Velayudhan became a martyr to the cause. Although we had to pay dearly for that freedom, it is indeed an achievement of that struggle that we were able to realise that lofty goal. The Madras government announced unrestricted temple entry at this time.

Prakasam tabled the Public Security Bill on March 1, 1948. There was a mass witch-hunt for Communist Party leaders. I was arrested by the Circle Inspector and his men in Wynad as I woke up from sleep.

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The Madras government released all those who had been imprisoned in connection with Independence Day, 1947. Comrade EMS and others reached Calicut on the 14th. The communique had specially mentioned that I would be released on August 15. But I was not released, though all the others were.

August 15 was celebrated jointly by all parties. There were grand celebrations and outbursts of joy throughout the country. On August 14, 1947 I was in solitary confinement in the big Cannanore jail. There were no other detenue prisoners. There were many comrades there arrested under the Kavumpayi and Karivellore cases, some under trial and some awaiting trial. I could not sleep at night. Cries of *Jai* issued from all four corners of the jail. The echoes of the slogans *Mahatma Gandhi ki jai* and *Bharath Matha ki jai* reverberated through the jail. The whole country was waiting for the celebration due after sun-rise. How many among them had waited for years for this and fought for it and sacrificed their all in the struggle. I nurtured feelings of joy and sorrow. I was glad that the goal for which I had sacrificed all my youth and for which I was still undergoing imprisonment had been

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realised. But I was even now a prisoner. I had been imprisoned by Indians—by the Congress Government, not by the British. Memories of the Congress from 1927 passed through my mind. I felt proud of the role I had played in the Congress movement in Kerala. A man who was Secretary of the Kerala Congress and its President for some time and member of the AICC for a long time was celebrating August 15 in jail! With these thoughts in my mind I paced to and fro in my cell.

To whom could I speak? My companions were the Wardens who were keeping guard all through the sleepless night! I talked to them. I explained the greatness of August 15. Our own government has come. They were glad that they would now get higher salaries. Poor people! They had been misled.

I decided to celebrate Independence Day in jail on August 15. I walked the length of the jail compound in the morning carrying a national flag that I had kept for the purpose. Some of my fellow prisoners accompanied me. The flag was hoisted on the roof of the third block where all the prisoners assembled. I spoke for four or five minutes. The jail authorities were not happy about this, but were not equal to a *lathi charge* that day. I was taken to the Calicut ADM's court after August 15, on a charge that I had stirred up the people against His Majesty the Emperor. Independence was achieved on August 15. I was arrested after that on a treason charge created by the British under a law popularly termed 124 A after its serial in the legal code. The people were amazed. *What sort of a government is this?*

I made the following statement to the court.

I am proud that I am being tried for creating enmity

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against the legally constituted Emperor of British India. All freedom lovers in this country and the leaders of the freedom movement from its birth, like Nehru, Gandhi and such leaders, have tried to create enmity against the Emperor's government. Mahatma Gandhi has been proceeded against under section 124 A IPC for working towards the same end.

As a result of all this, His Majesty's government and British India have ceased to exist today. Many of my colleagues who committed the same crime along with me have become Ministers and Governors. There is some incongruity in bringing me to trial at this time when on the face of it we have just achieved freedom. I am sorry that things should have come to such a pass.

The government pleader was K.P Ramunni Menon, a Congressman.

Agitations broke out throughout Kerala on September 16. The people felt that it was a great injustice to keep me in jail. Public meetings, demonstrations, deputations, telegrams, letters—all created a great stir. In many places Congressmen participated in the protest rallies, which intensified as time went on. I started to fast on September 20 for the 808 prisoners of the Cannanore jail to be recognised as political prisoners. I wrote to the Madras ministry in the following vein: *I was a political prisoner from 1930 to 1945 in the eyes of a foreign government. Under today's popular government I am branded as a criminal. The only reason I can find for this is that I am a Communist. I have been given 'A' class facilities only in order*

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to keep me isolated from other Communists. I hereby relinquish them.

I was down with fever on September 24. All my fellow prisoners went on fast on hearing this. It was at this time that 66 out of the 77 Karivellore prisoners were sentenced. Comrade A. V. Kunhambu was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. At the same time, the Madikkai case was withdrawn. I read in the newspapers that the Omandur ministry had ordered my release. But I was not released. I started fasting. There were general strikes in Badagara and Cannanore for my release. There was a *lathi-charge* and arrests in Cannanore. Comrade Azheekodan and others were arrested that day.



Addressing a rally

My release orders arrived on October 12. I broke my fast after coming out of jail. I sipped orange juice in front of the people gathered there and went home. My health was completely shattered. Doctors wanted me to take complete rest. They said that even talking to people would affect my health. Comrade Krishna Pillai rushed home on hearing this. He forced me to stay at home. He hung around like a watchman.

To comrades who called to meet me he would say gravely: *What, comrade? What do you want?* When they said that they had come to see me, he sent them away with the words, *Do you want him to die? If you love him, don't come to see him for the time being. When his health improves, he will come and see you.* Although I wanted to see them all, I did not say a word out of fear of Comrade Krishna Pillai. It was impossible not to submit to that loving discipline. It was a manifestation of the abiding loyalty that Comrade Krishna Pillai had towards friends and co-workers. It was that loyalty and affection that made him what he was.

I resumed my daily activities after a few days' rest. It was a time of agitations and struggles for the day-to-day needs of peasants and workers. I started participating in these struggles and assisting in their organisation. Cases continued to be launched against me for speeches made in some places. I came out on bail and contested the cases.

A noteworthy incident occurred at this time. We arranged a programme at Madikkai village in August, 1947 to collect funds for *Desabhimani*. We decided to arrange for a house-to-house collection. The local comrades made arrangements. The police were agitated by this. They started following us to each house. Finally, they came along with us. I was very annoyed and scolded one of them. He telegraphed the Inspector General Mangalore. *They are going to kill us*, he wrote. A vanload of special police arrived the same day. They descended on us at the village and started beating everyone. They went to the extent of breaking even the collection bowls of beggars. They pounced upon everything that they encountered on the

road. All in all, they created a great commotion. The people were incensed and staged massive demonstrations. This unnerved the government.

Fairs were in progress throughout Malabar at the time I was released. They had been organised for collecting funds for *Desabhimani*. The rich and the poor alike participated in them. The fairs then developed into a big annual event. There was not a single village where these melas were not held. Cultural programmes and speeches formed part of the programme. I toured the whole of Malabar taking part in these fairs. Chagrined by this mass upsurge, the government arrested me at Tamarasserry on December 17, 1947. The charge against me was that I had threatened to murder Head Constable Kurup by throwing him into the river.

I found myself a detainee prisoner once again. What exactly was the charge against me? *My going to jail in 1937 and 1942 and my struggles against imperialism*. I was undergoing punishment for having worked before as a Congressman. I was sorry and ashamed that a Congress Government should lay such a charge against me and keep me in jail. Jail life once again. Terrible. For how long? Even that remained a mystery. I was being held under the preventive detention ordinance for which there was no fixed term!

I was taken to Vellore jail. There were already many detainee prisoners when I arrived there. It seems the Government felt that it would be dangerous to keep me there. They decided to shift me the next morning. I was separated secretly from the other prisoners the next morning and escorted to the Rajahmundry jail in Andhra. Most of the prisoners there were

Andhra detenues. They were all lodged in a special cell inside the jail. I was put in an outhouse outside the jail, to endure the scorching heat and solitary life. No one except the warden was there. I spent two weeks in this sort of confinement and discovered, not surprisingly, that living in such conditions was not conducive to good health. I started a fast. It was terminated after 20 days on condition that I would be lodged with the other prisoners. A little afterwards I was shifted to Coimbatore jail. I was placed in solitary confinement here too. After a few days M. R. Venkataraman was brought over from Vellore jail. Facilities were quite poor. Both of us started fasting. We were granted some facilities at the end of 26 days of fasting, but we resumed the fast after 10 days as many of the assurances we had been given were broken by the jail authorities. After another ten days' fast our demands were finally conceded.

We were shifted to the Cuddalore jail. All detainee prisoners in the State were kept there. I spent nearly three years in that jail with Andhra comrades. It was an eventful life. There were about 400 detainee prisoners there. All except Comrade Venkataraman and I were from Andhra. There were some who had been transferred from the Telengana jail. Brave young men; some of them had fought as guerillas. They had suffered a lot. Even inside the jail, we had to conduct agitations for edible meals and other facilities. An ex-minister's son, Thomas, was Superintendent. He was an immature and haughty official who was responsible for most of the unpleasant things that happened in the jail. But the constant *lathi-charges*, firings and fasts were a result of the

Party's hard line. There were two firings in the Cuddalore jail. Three prisoners died—two detenues and an ordinary prisoner. The first agitation was against the practice of confining the prisoners in the lock-up at night. We took our stand against this after giving advance notice to the authorities. At 3 o'clock that afternoon the Inspector General of the jail held a police march-past. The jail Wardens also accompanied the policemen. They started beating us. We resisted, and threw stones and other projectiles at them. We clambered over the jail building with stones and sticks in our hands. This lasted for about an hour. They finally opened fire. A comrade from Telengana and another from Ramnad were killed, and very many were injured. They surrounded the prisoners after this and beat them up severely. The injured were removed to hospital. Medicines and other facilities were either not available at the hospital or were inadequate. The others started a fast. 300 people joined in the fast which lasted five days.

After that, terrible brutalities were unleashed in jail once more. They put us under 24 hours' lock-up and withdrew the special facilities of detinue prisoners. We decided to conduct another agitation against this. A Telengana comrade died in that agitation. Many were injured. These struggles were forced on us by the excruciating misery of jail life. One has to admit, however, that the Party's policy also played a part in this.

Similar incidents occurred in Vellore, Trivandrum, Salem and other jails. Conditions in the Vellore jail were worse than ours. Although there was no firing, *lathi charges* were common there. The man-hunt at Salem jail occurred at about

the same time. Many beloved and valued comrades were lost in this struggle.

M. R. Venkataraman and I were lodged in the same cell. We used to file occasional affidavits and write to the Court as a matter of course. A writ was filed in the Supreme Court against preventive detention. It was based on a very important constitutional issue. I was taken to Delhi for the hearing of this writ.

The journey was very interesting. I travelled in a special First Class compartment accompanied by two Inspectors and twelve policemen. The compartment next to ours was filled with policemen. A dozen policemen would be ready at each station. It was as though I would fly away if they took their eyes off me. I was lodged in the district jail in Delhi. The jail conditions were poor. I started to fast the moment I arrived there, which resulted in a small change for the better.

It was a momentous law-suit. While in jail Rao and Reddy of Madras used to assist me and the other prisoners in the conduct of our cases. Their help was invaluable. The case was also argued by them. The counsel was Sri M. K. Nambiar. It was the first law-suit on a constitutional issue. Nambiar set forth his brief in the Supreme Court for about six days. He argued that the Preventive Detention Act was a complete violation of the constitution and hence illegal. My arrest under the Act was therefore unlawful. But the court ruled that the Act was constitutional. It was therefore held that my detention also was lawful. But the court declared that Clause 14 of the Act was illegal as it violated the constitutional right of the detainee to move the courts for invalidation of his deten-

tion. Their point was that it infringed the fundamental rights guaranteed by Clauses 22 and 33 of the Constitution. This judgement has helped a lot in safeguarding the fundamental rights of those detained under the Preventive Detention Act. Moreover, the arguments cited by Sri Nambiar in support of his contention that the Act itself was unconstitutional are still hotly debated by other judges and legal experts. Although that law-suit failed to bring about my release, it was a great achievement in the sense that raised an important constitutional issue. I returned to jail under police escort. I can never forget my life in Cuddalore jail. I picked up a little Telugu from our Andhra comrades who were instrumental in saving me from being shot during the jail agitation.

Although the Supreme Court judgement was unfavourable to my case, I was not prepared to remain quiescent. I filed another writ in the Madras High Court. It was heard by Justice Satyanarayana Rao. I argued the case myself. Large crowds came to hear the argument. The court set me free on the last day of the hearing. I was re-arrested after release at the door of the court and escorted once more to Cuddalore jail. I filed another writ petition which was heard two days after my re-arrest. The court released me again. The judges specially ordered the police not to touch me. The police did not dare to disregard this injunction. I had been imprisoned in December 1947 and released in 1951. Four years in jail!

I was unable to find a room to stay in, in Madras city. One hotel agreed to give a room, but after an hour it refused under police pressure. I telephoned Kozhipurath Madhava Menon,

who was a minister at that time, that I had no place to stay and that hotel owners were not giving me a room to stay in. But my plea went unheard. After all, it was a time of Communist persecution. I finally managed to get hotel accommodation on my own.

There was country-wide fear of the police. My hotel was surrounded by CID men. None of them was, however, bold enough to come out in the open. Arrests and brutalities were continuing. Sub-Inspector Palaniappan was terrorising the whole of Andhra State. I decided that something should be done to dispel this fear. Elections were due in a year. The Communist Party was free to participate in them and to woo the voters. It was vital that this freedom which so rarely came our way should be effectively used. My main concern was to pave the way for this.

While I had been in jail there had been many changes both nationally and internationally. It was a new epoch characterised by the liberation struggles of colonial peoples. American imperialists had intensified their efforts to bring European nations under their economic and social hegemony. The Marshall Plan and the NATO alliance marked the beginnings of this. The US set aside vast sums of money for espionage work in the Soviet Union and other Communist nations. But it was at this time that Chiang Kai Shek, whose rule in China had been buttressed by American arms, was chased out of the mainland by the liberation army.

The second Congress of the Communist Party met in Calcutta at this time of crucial international developments. The Party's policy and programme changed and in two or

three months it became the object of attacks on an All-India scale by the government. In March the press and paper of the Central Committee were banned. In April, the Party newspapers *Desabhimani*, *Visalandhra*, *Swadhinatha*, *Navalokam*, *Nayazamana* and others were banned. Its weeklies, *Naya Hindustan* (Urdu), *Janayug* (Hindi), *Janasakthi* (Tamil), *Navayugam* (Malayalam), *Aruna* (Kannada), *Nairuniya* (Oriya), *Janasakthi* (Bihari) and *Mathamath* (Bengali) were also banned.

The police opened fire at the meeting of the All-India Students Federation which was held at this time in Bombay. The government thus came out in the open, having given the police a blank cheque to crush the workers' struggles, as well as middle class and students' protest movements. It was at this time that communalists won decisive influence both inside the Congress party and government. The voice of Patel and Tandon could be heard at this time over all others. It was at this time too that Mahatma Gandhi, who successfully toured Naokali in the interests of communal unity and brotherhood, died of an assassin's bullet, a martyr to communal hatred.

The food problem had become acute in Kerala. Workers' agitations intensified at the same time. The Government resorted to brutal repressive measures against it. On April 12, 1947 *Desabhimani* was banned as a preliminary to this. Following this, there were firings on the 15th at Tillankeri, on the 30th at Onchiyam and on May 1 at Munayan Hills. Much before this, i.e. even before the Calcutta conference of the Party in February, the Party had been banned in Kerala.

There was regular police *raj* after the strike at the Aaron Mill. Hoodlums were organised to hunt out Party leaders.

Atrocities of a kind not seen even during the Moplah rebellion stalked the country. The looting and burning of houses, beating of people at random, and the raping of women, became everyday occurrences and law and order became non-existent. Not content with all this, troops were brought in and marched through the hinterland. MSP camps and police stations were established all over Kerala. The atmosphere reeked with the stench of gunpowder and blood. Terror and indignation spread their tentacles among the people. The Communist Party had not been banned at this time. This so called legality did not protect its members from the systematic campaign of arson, loot and murder that was launched against them. Kanthalott and KPR were arrested at this time and almost done to death. Lock-ups were filled with Party members and sympathisers. The young as well as the old, the educated as well as the unlettered—all became the victims of these outrages.

Comrades EMS and Krishna Pillai were underground at this time. It was then that Comrade Krishna Pillai died of snake bite, on August 19, 1948, at the hut of a worker at Muhamma. It was a great blow to the Party. We could hardly believe the news of his death when we first heard of it in jail. We were shocked when we heard the whole story. Comrade Krishna Pillai was the life and soul of the Kerala Party. He was the colleague and leader of thousands of co-workers like me. His death moved us deeply. It was many weeks before we could free ourselves from its pain and shock. One thing consoled us. The light that Comrade Krishna Pillai had lit in thousands of hearts would not die out. That name would live

for ever as a guiding star and a beacon light to people striving for progress and a new life. Comrade Krishna Pillai would live for ever in the hearts and minds of all those who believed in justice and the brotherhood of man.

By 1949 two post-war developments of a momentous nature had taken place in the international field. The first was the liberation of China and the second the news that the Soviet Union had successfully manufactured atom bombs. American power supremacy collapsed against this reality. The traditional balance of power between nations was substantially altered by this momentous event. The liberation of China and the attitude of imperialist powers towards that event prompted Asian countries to re-examine and modify their former views on the international scene so visibly altered in so brief a period. Provocations with an implicit threat of war were noticeable in both Asia and the West.

But there was another side to the coin. The anti-war stand of the peoples of the world as a consequence of the miseries of two World Wars was becoming more pronounced. The peace movement came into being as an expression of this growing mass attitude, and was able to inspire a world-wide campaign against nuclear weapons.

At the time attempts were being made in India to overcome the country's economic problems through American aid. The draft of the first five-year plan was released. There was no place in it for heavy industries.

Along with plans for economic betterment, plans were also concocted to suppress the struggles of the masses suffering on account of unemployment and poverty. Great repres-

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sion was unleashed in Malabar and such other places.

Party candidates contested the District Board elections being held at the time (1948). The Party made such an emphatic reappearance as to confound those who had vowed that there would be no trace of Communism for a century. The Party's sympathisers and the oppressed people voted for it. This was bewildering to reactionaries and officials. Bent on stemming this, the Party was banned on the very day the votes were counted. Mass arrests and repression were intensified. It was at this time that the massacre in the Salem jail occurred. Unarmed prisoners, especially *class C* prisoners, were beaten to death one day in the jail. Sri Kozhipurath Madhava Menon was then Minister for Jails. Terrible atrocities were perpetrated both inside the jail and outside. In Madurai and Tanjore in Tamil Nadu, comrades were shot dead in public view. Countless people were shot dead in Telengana too, when the brave peasants conducted their historic struggle against the Nizam's rule and against feudalism. The peasants of Telengana rose in arms against thousands of policemen and troops. It shook the Indian government badly. Troop reinforcements were sent to Telengana to quell the uprising and crores of rupees wasted. It was in the name of law and order, an empty phrase, that Communists were hounded throughout the country.

Attempts were made to put down the peasant movement in Chirakkal district. Thaliyan Raman Nambiar and others were sentenced to life imprisonment. Peasant leader Rairu Nambiar was taken out of the prison by Inspector Ray and shot dead atop a hill. The MSP did not even leave old women

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like Kunjakkavamma alone. The heart-rending tales of the ruthless manhunt of the MSP are still green in the people's memory.

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It was an atmosphere of all-pervading terror and pain that I encountered when I was released from jail. Man's basic civil liberties were trampled underfoot. Although the leaders advertised incessantly that the aim was to build up a welfare state through democratic means, the signs of mistrust and fear were visible everywhere. Although new elections to Parliament were promised, it was not clear to the people how these would be achieved in practice and if they were, how fairly. As for the Communist party, it was a period of ideological confusion. Some Party comrades felt that the policies and programmes adopted by the Party in the wake of the Calcutta Congress were a mistake. But, how to proceed, how to act? How could the Party work legally? What stand should the Party take towards the new elections? It would not be incorrect to say that the Party was caught up in a whirlpool of confused ideas at the time.

When I came out of jail, there were differences of opinion on whether I should go underground or work legally. But I had arrived at a decision in this matter. I was convinced I could dispel by my legal campaigning the terror and anxiety

that prevailed among the people at the time. Whatever happened, I would work legally using the opportunity that was at hand. I stayed where I was. The Party gave me permission. Thus a meeting under the red flag was held in Madras after an interval of four years. It was a good meeting. The people were in high spirits. I decided afterwards to tour the whole of Tamil Nadu.

I went first to Madurai. A public meeting was arranged there. A flag was hoisted at the site of the meeting which was on the banks of the river. The people glanced at the flag and went their way. They had forgotten the time they had last seen a red flag. Barely a year had passed since Manavalan and other worker-comrades had been tied to iron poles and shot dead. It was usual at that time for people suspected to be Communists to be shot dead. We were afraid that nobody might turn up for the meeting in this atmosphere of fear. I went to the meeting exactly at 6 o'clock. I found 100 people. But people began to drift in gradually. In an hour's time about 10,000 had assembled. Midway through the meeting there were 25,000 people. The people were bitter against the government. They had remained quiescent all this time because of fear. They expressed their hatred now that they had an opportunity. This was what that meeting taught me. I collected funds for the forthcoming election and for the Party coffers.

In all, my tour of Tamil Nadu lasted two weeks. I went to Malabar after this. I found unlimited enthusiasm there. Donations totalling 30,000 rupees were received. We were able to open a Party office and start a paper with that money. My task at that time was to re-build the Party. I was able to

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accomplish this task to some degree.

After the Malabar programme I toured Andhra for 15 days. The conditions in Andhra at that time were more terrible than in all other places. To hold a public meeting was a great thing in itself, as it was a time of brutal repression and no one dared to walk alone in places like Vijayawada. In all my meetings, I spoke strongly against Palaniappan's man-hunt. This helped create a new enthusiasm amongst the people who attended my meetings in thousands. The meetings gave utterance to the unexpressed feelings of the suppressed people of Andhra. The freedom to hold meetings, talk freely and operate an office was thus restored after three or four years of terrifying rule. Party activities were gradually revived. Party leaders were either in jail or underground. The important thing was to bring them out into the open before the election. As our intention to participate in the election became known, the leaders were freed one by one. I was elected at this time as member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. All public work was at that time done by me. Thus the heavy responsibility of preparing the people for the elections fell on me.

I went to Travancore from Andhra. C. Kesavan's ministry was in power. A month prior to my arrival in Travancore, a meeting of Communist sympathisers was held at Alleppey to consider the election. As the delegates' meeting was going on, the police came and arrested Comrades T.V, Gouri, Kumaran Vakil, Sugathan, Das and others. There were arrests after this in all important Party centres.

I received an order of the District Magistrate as soon as

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I reached Quilon. It forbade me to speak publicly anywhere in Quilon district. I went to Trivandrum immediately. There were police vans at the rear and in front of my car. I met Chief Minister C. Kesavan at Trivandrum. He threw up his hands in helplessness as it was a decision of the Congress Party. I was issued a Prohibitory Order in Trivandrum too. I left immediately for Alleppey. As I stepped into a hotel at Quilon on the way, the police were all around me. Some student-comrades came to see me. A bold one among them asked me, *Comrade, why don't you defy the Prohibitory Order?* I was pleased with his enthusiasm. I explained the position to him. *I used to do the same thing at your age; but I have before me a heavy responsibility today. The Government needs to put me in jail. But the need of the country can be best served at this juncture by keeping the party within the law and making the maximum use of the limited freedom available.*

I bade them goodbye and set out for Alleppey, where I rested in a hotel. The police did their duty here also. I set out for Wayalar from there and reached Comrade Karunakara Panikkar's house. The police surrounded the house. I was not given a chance even to eat. I got angry and called the police chief and thundered at him. The poor man said: *What can we do? There are orders from above. If we don't obey them, we will lose our jobs.* I felt that it would not be proper to put the inmates of the house to inconvenience. Picking up a mat I went to the Wayalar hills, the last resting place of the Wayalar Comrades. I spread my mat atop a hill and lay there and thought to myself: *I suffered hunger, misery and torture for a long time to nurture the Congress. That Congress rules Travancore today. My one*

time co-workers turn the wheels of power. I cannot even sip a drop of water during their rule without the police watching me. I came to a decision. I would conduct Party work with vigour using the limited freedom that I had. I lay there for about an hour and a half, reflecting. The police stood guard in the darkness and slush. In the meantime, the comrades of Shertallay made arrangements for a car. I somehow slipped through the police cordon and left. It was then I am I went to Ernakulam. The police were furious when they missed me. They searched all four quarters. No trace anywhere. They finally set out for Ernakulam. They camped around the hotel where I was lodging. More, they even followed me right up to the Travancore border. They returned after seeing me cross the boundary.

At the end of my South Indian tour, I went to Bombay to campaign for election funds. I can never forget the reception I got at the Bombay railway station. The Malayalees gave me a tremendous ovation. They raised 7,000 rupees during my short stay. Meetings were held in many places.

The All-India Kisan Sabha met at Calcutta from August 6 to 11, 1951. I was elected President, and the Secretary was Bankim Mukherjee. Kisan leaders were all either underground or in jail at that time. There were 1,982 firings during this period. As a result 3,784 people died, 10,000 were injured, and 50,000 were imprisoned. 82 were killed in jail.

Towards the end of 1951 a new experiment was initiated. The Communist Party decided to give parliamentary democracy a trial. The Party had made mistakes. It had over-involved itself in heroic and adventurist activities. But these

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were all undertaken with the welfare and interests of the people as the overriding aim. Members of the Party had been willing to suffer any hardships for this. Their selfless living had helped to forge a bond between themselves and the people. It was because of this that the people welcomed the Party wholeheartedly when it emerged after correcting its mistakes. The 1951 election was a proof of this. Elections were held in Travancore-Cochin in December, 1951. As the Party leaders were in jail, the election was contested under the name *United Front*. It was a union of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and the Communist Party. The United Front candidates did splendidly. Its success presaged the change sweeping through other States too.

The new election was fought in an atmosphere of great excitement and enthusiasm. The result was a blow to the enemies of the Party who thought in terms of suppressing it. The Party achieved a creditable victory although very many of its leaders were underground or in jail.

I was the candidate for the Cannanore parliamentary constituency. My Congress opponent was Congress President C. K. Govindan Nair. I got 164,000 votes and Sri Govindan Nair 74,000. I thus won with an overwhelming majority. The trust reposed in me by the people was a declaration of their loyalty to the Communist Party.

The Communist Party and the United Front became the second largest force, both in Parliament and in the State Assemblies as a whole, in the general elections held in India in January, 1952, with 31 seats in Parliament and 239 seats in the Assemblies. In the State Assemblies the Party and its allies

won 34 per cent of the seats it contested, and in Parliament 44 per cent.

There were 31 Communist Party members and sympathisers in Parliament. The government did not care to recognise the Communist group as the official opposition. They put forward the novel theory that there should be at least 50 members to qualify for recognition as the official opposition. The ruling party held that a party of 30 members could only be regarded as a group. The Communist Party thus started work as the only opposition group recognised in Parliament as such. I was elected leader of this group. The office of Leader of the Opposition in Parliament was a very responsible position and I wondered how I could do justice to it. But I felt confident that I would be able to acquit myself creditably with the assistance of my colleagues.

A new life, a new environment, a new alliance. I found myself in an environment calculated to ruin a man. First class travel, comfortable chambers in Parliament, a surfeit of money, magnificent quarters, and a life free of heavy responsibility. All circumstances favourable to a life of pleasure. Is anything more necessary to turn a man's head? Daily garden parties and tea parties given either by the Prime Minister, the President or the Vice President. In addition there were a host of invitations from the foreign embassies. That was the setting in which ties of friendship could be established with the fashionable men and women who constituted the upper crust of society. On top of all this, there were state banquets that provided us with an opportunity to shake hands and to have tea with Chou En-Lai, Bulganin, Dulles, Tito and other

foreign dignitaries.

On the other hand, people from all strata of society were arriving daily to meet Parliament members to present petitions and memoranda. We were thus faced with a combination of circumstances that brought us face to face with temptations of authoritarianism and luxurious living, as well as of self-conceit. Communists like me who had suffered for want of a change of clothes to wear, for want of shelter for a night's sleep, for want of money to pay for our tea and bus fare, and who were scoffed at by the elite of society, were particularly liable to be spoilt by this sudden onset of luxury.

I was worried by two things as I entered Parliament. First, I was anxious about whether I would be able to do any useful work at all in this environment. And secondly, whether I would be able to emerge unscathed by the temptations of this system after five years.

Many from the Congress side tried to rope in pliable people from the Opposition. If the person was weak-willed he ran the risk of being ensnared. Inclusion in delegations going abroad and in committees were some of the temptations that were used to snare the unwary away from the path that their conscience dictated.

The Government was scared of the Opposition—particularly of the Communist Party. It was almost customary for them to rant unnecessarily against the Communist Party in every speech and to repeat ad infinitum that the Communist Party was an agent of Russia. They were ready to invent the starkest of untruths to this end.

This came out very plainly on a number of occasions.

While speaking in the Lok Sabha, the Home Minister once charged that a person deported from a country for conducting espionage activities there was working in the Central Office of the Indian Communist Party. We challenged the Government to substantiate that statement and said that we were ready to throw out the man from the Party in that event. But they wriggled out with some platitudinous subterfuge. There was thus the ridiculous spectacle of an allegation raised by the Home Minister and supported by the Prime Minister going unsubstantiated. Later on, the Minister made a statement in Parliament that we were getting books *gratis* from Russia. The statement was exposed when we offered to produce records of the financial transactions executed through banks.

There was thus on the one side a desire to vilify the Opposition at any cost. On the other, a tendency to ignore the Opposition. It is a fundamental courtesy in democratic procedure to consult the Opposition on important national and international developments. A committee including Opposition parties had been set up for this purpose in Parliament. But the ruling party did not care to consult the Opposition even in such strategically important matters as Goa. Why say more? The statement issued by Finance Minister Deshmukh when he resigned from the Cabinet throws more light on this. Even in such matters as Samyukta Maharashtra, those responsible for the decision did not consult their Cabinet colleagues. The overall framework was such that one did not feel hopeful about this much-eulogised Parliamentary Democracy.

But it would be folly not to consider the other side of this picture. The trend of activities of the Communist Party and

other Opposition parties changed after they entered Parliament. The question of the common man's daily requirements was raised in Parliament for the first time. Although debates were disallowed on several issues, statements had to be made in Parliament on this matter. Several important Acts on security of employment and minimum wage were passed because of the pressure exerted by the Opposition. When the Opposition introduced Bills helpful to the common man, they were obliged to say, *We propose to introduce similar legislation*. The Opposition Bills were never adopted, but they had to table somewhat similar Bills themselves, although these were never quite as progressive as ours.

But this was entirely inadequate. If this system is to yield any beneficial results, one pre-requisite is a strong Opposition. This can only be when the Government does not have a huge majority to swamp the Opposition, and the latter is strong enough to threaten the Government's existence whenever it sidesteps the public interest. It is also necessary that public opinion is responsive and alert. Otherwise, this Parliamentary System tends to become a farce. An important point in this matter is that the very future of Parliamentary Democracy depends on the mutual co-operation of Opposition parties and their unity in the face of common issues.

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Some important developments on a personal plane occurred within a year after Parliament assembled. One of these was my visit to China, Russia and other countries as well as my participation in the Pacific Ocean Peace Conference held in China and 19th Congress of the Russian Communist Party. The other was that I married again, this time with a new outlook and on a new basis.

My marriage took place on September 10, 1952. I married Susheela who was the niece of Comrade Karunakara Panikkar of Cheerappanchira in Muhamma village of Shertallay *taluk*.

Comrade Karunakara Panikkar's household was almost a Party stronghold. Comrade Panikkar was careful in bringing up Susheela in tune with such a household. He played a considerable part in bringing about our marriage.

He was an unobtrusive Party worker. President of the Muhamma coir factory workers' union even before the agitation for responsible government of 1939 began, he was in the forefront of the agitation for responsible government. The Government arrested him and also confiscated his coir factory. Although the Government offered to restore the factory

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A. K. Gopalan with wife

on condition that he retracted his political stand, he was resolute in his refusal to compromise his principles. He was one of the leaders of the historic Punnapra-Wayalar struggle conducted by the working class of Alleppey and Shertallay *taluks*. He went underground along with other leaders in connection with that struggle. The Government confiscated his house and land as well as his coir factory. As he did not yield this time either, he lost the factory. The properties were restored to him after three years. After 1948, he spent some time in the underground. Although he retired in later life from active political work, he remained a good friend of the Party till the end of his life.

Comrade Panikkar's immediate family and relatives maintained close ties with the Party. Gopalan Chettan, husband of Sarojini, Susheela's elder sister, was the Party's Branch Secretary at Muttam. He died a few years ago of heart failure. Sarojini was employed in a Government department. Sir C.P.'s government dismissed her for the sole reason that she belonged to a Communist family. Even in the midst of various privations, she and her children remained good friends and active workers of the Communist Party. Her eldest son is a Party member.

Comrade Panikkar's little family gave refuge to me and other comrades when we were underground. When I was camping there Susheela was a keen young student who tried to follow and understand political developments. The company of this vivacious girl provided some relief to me, living underground, as I did, for twenty four hours of the day. I delighted in instructing her on political matters and assisting

her in her homework. The peaceful atmosphere of that small family consisting of Panikkar, his sister and three children turned my thoughts to the pleasures of family life. I became almost a member of the family in my three months' stay there, and developed a strong attachment to young Susheela. Initially I was hesitant about proffering my suit, for what had I to offer save a miserable existence to that darling girl? I tried to overcome my emotions and longing, but found it impossible to put the exquisite image of the young girl, who overwhelmed me with affection, out of my mind.

Even after leaving Comrade Panikkar's house, I tried to forget her. I stopped writing to her. As I emerged from the underground, a comrade informed me: *Susheela treasures your photograph. She is sad that you did not write.* I decided that I would see her. Comrade Krishna Pillai offered to come with me. But we could not make it. I was arrested. She came to see me while I was in Coimbatore jail. I felt an even greater attachment towards her, now more mature and poised. We decided then and there that we would get married as soon as I was released from jail. She helped me to some degree in keeping myself in touch with the Party, now banned. She was expelled from several colleges, because her correspondence with me was traced by CID officials. I came out of jail when she was studying for the BA at Alleppey college. Our marriage could not be celebrated immediately because of the elections, rush of work and opposition from relatives. As I returned at the end of the Parliament session, I toured the famine affected areas of Ambalapuzha and Shertallay *taluks*. One evening during that period the Party made arrangements for our mar-

riage. Our marriage took place under Comrade K.C George's ministership before a vast gathering of friends and comrades at the Alleppey union office. There were no marriage ceremonies for our wedding except an exchange of red garlands made by the Alleppey workers. My long cherished dream of a life-partner ready to share my joys and sorrows, my hopes and fears, my work and leisure, had at length come true. The long wait of nine years added sweetness to our union.

I feared whether Susheela, who had grown up in a different environment, would get along with my family. But she was able to integrate herself with my family and become the darling of my aged mother. This was a great relief to me. She was also able to get along with my brother's family.

Susheela is not only my wife but also a comrade of my Party. It is a source of pleasure as well as of difficulty when both husband and wife are full time Party workers. Our daughter Laila suffered most from this. She was actually brought up by Susheela's mother and Sarojini.

Susheela helps me a great deal in my present political activities. But for her help and care I certainly would not have been able to work as much as I am doing now. She plays a great role in keeping me in good health. She dutifully fulfils the task of looking after me as a Party comrade. At the same time, she looks after her own work as a Party worker.

Like me, she too is sickly. When I fall ill, she is there to attend on me and when she is ill, I look after her. Fortunately we are seldom both ill at the same time. We want our daughter Laila to grow up in the same environment and develop the same ideals, but no one can foretell the future. Only time can

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A. K. Gopalan with wife and daughter

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decide that. Comrade Panikkar and Susheela are both responsible for turning Susheela's family into Party sympathisers and workers. I myself had only a small role to play in that. I am hopeful that in the future also that family will maintain this tradition untarnished.

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I set out for Delhi from Calicut on September 16, 1952. At 1:30am on the 18th I flew from there for Hong Kong to attend the Asian Pacific Ocean Peace Conference in China. A large gathering consisting of friends and comrades were at Palam airport to see us off. With me were Dr. Kitchlew, the aged and revered leader of the Indian delegation, the Bhopal Congress leader and former Chief Minister Malaviya, Dr. Alam of Ali-garh University and business magnate Anjaneyalu Kettuppalli of Andhra. We reached Calcutta at 4am Subjoda Banerjee, Mrs. Pankaj, Acharya Haridas Nandi, Dr. Mehta, Mrs. Mehta, Ramakrishna Panth and others were there with us. Our plane thus left for Hong Kong carrying 18 people working in different fields. We reached Bangkok, capital of Thailand, at 10 the next morning. After a little rest we resumed the flight reaching Hong Kong at 3am That beautiful city of two million people is full of magnificent buildings and broad avenues. Although under British domination, it was filled with Americans. The city, perched on a hill top, presented a fascinating sight as we viewed it from the top of our hotel. It was a city of thousands of industrial workers. Cotton mill workers alone

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numbered 50,000. Although civil liberties were restricted, a strong trade union existed there. We learned the same day about an INTUC organisation under American control.

Press representatives came to meet us. They wanted to know whether the peace movement belonged to Communists. Dr. Kitchlew and I spoke to them for about half an hour. Six of the local newspapers were dailies. Three of these were English dailies which were tools of Anglo-American propaganda. We were told that the other newspapers which were a little progressive suffered from periodical bans as well as restrictions and other difficulties.

Leaving Hong Kong on the morning of September 20, we reached Shanton railway station. That was the border of China. China was only a bridge away from that station. I spoke to the train crew with the help of an interpreter. They spoke gladly about China. They said that many changes had come about in four years and their salary had increased 20 times. Their faces reflected happiness, hope and well-being.

Volunteers and peace committee members were there at Shanton to welcome us. Before we resumed our journey from there, I talked to a girl serving in the railway with the help of an interpreter. With great pride she spoke about China. She said the new Government had brought happiness and plenty into their lives. I was amazed by the knowledge of world affairs shown by that ordinary railway worker. She knew a great deal about India and Nehru, and even about Nehru's latest statement that the five big powers should jointly end the war in Korea. She also knew about the conference that we were attending. I momentarily compared her knowledge

with that of our own graduates and post-graduates, who write in examination answer papers that Cariappa is the Prime Minister of India. She told me that everyone in China spent two hours a day studying and reading.

We reached Canton by the next train. Thousands of people had gathered at the railway station to receive us. We left for Peking after the day's dinner reception. The reception at Peking airport was touching as well as unforgettable. Smiling little children welcomed us with bouquets of flowers. A huge concourse of people, including delegates from the Soviet Union, Turkey and Indonesia, received us.

I stayed at Peking Hotel, the largest in Peking. The six-storey *Peace Hotel* (so termed because all the delegates to the Conference were put up there) which towered into the sky as though to guard the honour of Chinese workers was completed in just 75 days. On September 26 I went to see the Great Wall, one of the most remarkable structures in the world. It was a journey of four hours from Peking. We reached the nearest railway station at noon leaving behind us fields, valleys and river beds. The next mile was a strenuous climb over a hill. We were tired as we reached the top of that great wall. But the view from there was splendid. One could see great walls rising one by one over each other. Everyone will admit that this wall, erected in ancient times to protect China against foreign invasion, is a lasting monument to the hard work of the Chinese people.

As there were still two or three days more before the Peace Congress was scheduled to begin, I had an opportunity to go sightseeing and to familiarise myself with the people. I also

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attended the Chinese National Day celebration. That mammoth demonstration attended by nearly seven million people lasted nearly six hours. Comrade Mao took the salute as the parade passed the dais. It was a very exciting demonstration by people of all sections of the population who lost themselves in the spirit of the occasion. I felt that the demonstration was an expression of the progress achieved by the Chinese people in such a short time. I was particularly heartened by the general spirit of good cheer and merriment that prevailed.

Equally unforgettable was the banquet given by Comrade Mao on September 30. I have attended many receptions. I have seen various types of garden parties frequented by the highest levels of society. But now for the first time I was attending a garden party that glorified the life of the worker and honoured work. I felt that the presence of worker-leaders and peasants, who occupied the very front row, gave an added lustre to that banquet. It was a novel and gratifying experience for me.

Nearly 400 delegates from 42 countries who attended the Peace Congress that began on October 2 held prolonged discussions on world peace. The Congress was important in several respects. It paved the way for a universal agreement on the necessity for peace, the ways of attaining it, and the establishment of cordial relations between nations. As the first concrete step towards the lessening of world tension and developing the world peace movement in its present form, it was a very important conference. It would not be incorrect to say that India and China agreed on the *Panch Sheel* or five principles of co-existence as a result of this movement.

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Another pleasant surprise for me at this conference was to discover the great regard that the people of the world, particularly the Chinese, had for India. As I stood up to speak as India's representative, there was continuous applause for five minutes which delayed my speech. At every stage of the speech, there was applause. I forgot myself in their demonstration of joy and spoke for half an hour extempore, disregarding the notes that I had prepared. The people I met on the streets also showed tremendous affection. Even little children would show special interest when the name India was mentioned.

Even before the end of the Peace Congress, Comrade Hardev and I left for Moscow to attend the 19th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. Because of bad weather, we reached Moscow only on the 7th. The meeting had begun on the 5th. I wanted to be present for the Congress at least on the 8th, but had a bad cold. I hoped to go for the Conference after taking some medicines, but in the meantime a queue of doctors started arriving in my room one by one, and did not allow me to leave. I was confined to my room for two days with pills and electric treatment. I was finally allowed to attend the Conference on the 11th.

I was seated on the dais among the fraternal delegates. 4,000 delegates and an equal number of visitors attended the Congress. There was detailed discussion on the draft of the new five-year plan, a five-hour working day and doubling of wages. Discussions had been held earlier on the same subjects in factories and collective farms. The Congress amended the draft in the light of these discussions. Moreover, some ministers and delegates who had not adequately discharged

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their responsibilities were severely censured.

We went sight-seeing in Moscow that day. We visited leading research institutions and the Moscow University where 120,000 students studied. The University was housed in a 25-storey building, with built-in park, cinema house, factory, and concert hall. There were elevators leading up to all these places. New buildings were coming up.

We went afterwards to see the Bolshoi theatre. I have never in my life seen such a colossal and magnificent theatre. Nearly 10,000 people could be seated inside. There were nine balconies. One had to use opera glasses to watch the performance from the upper balconies. Some of the finest dramatic and musical performances in the world are featured here. I was quite entranced by the magnificent dramatic sets I saw.

As the Conference was in progress, we could not do much sight-seeing. The meeting ended on the 13th. I spoke for five minutes giving India's salutations to the Conference. I had the same experience here as in China. When the words Indian delegate were mentioned, the delegates gave me a standing ovation. There was applause at the end of each sentence. When I concluded, they again rose and applauded. I felt proud of our country. How much others love and respect us!

Comrade Stalin spoke to the Conference on the concluding day. Each sentence of his was received with applause. I found their hearts overflowing with love and respect for Stalin. The Conference ended with the Internationale.

There was a banquet next day at the Kremlin palace. India was given the fourth place near Stalin. When the time came

for toasting India, Stalin came to me, brought the glass near and said simply: *To India*. He enquired about my own and Comrade Ajoy's health. He asked me to meet him before I left the country. But Stalin died before I left Russia. On the day after the banquet, doctors again examined me, this time at a clinic. A number of doctors then discussed my symptoms among themselves. This was how they treated patients there.

Before the result of the Conference could be known, some 40 of us left for Stalingrad. We saw fried chicken, ducks, eggs and groceries being sold by women at the station. We learnt that these women had joined collective farms, but that these commodities had been produced privately by farming their own yards.

We reached Stalingrad. I found many new buildings under construction there. The scars of the war were terrible. But the speed with which post-war reconstruction was going on was amazing. We saw the museum there. It contained many historic remains from 1918, the relics of the heroes of the liberation and the war period. There were even presents sent from Indore and Punjab following the Stalingrad victory.

I went to see a plant making mechanical ploughs—a large factory. Every single worker was a member of the union. The union had its own building. It contained a reading room, a club, a cinema hall and class rooms. Workers there could not only work but also develop themselves physically and intellectually. We visited the hill called Vavayov Kurggan where a battle was fought against the Germans. We could see vestiges of the war. We also visited the factory named 'Revolution'. The workers here had the same facilities as those

in the other factory.

The next morning we went to see the Volga-Don canal. We saw at a prominent place in the city the graveyards of those who fell in the battle. After paying homage there, we boarded the vessel 'Maxim Gorki' which was waiting for us and set out to see the canal. The Volga-Don canal proves that miracles can be achieved with human effort, the power of machines and scientific know-how. An artificial sea had been created at a place called Similianskaya. It was 25 miles wide and 150 miles long. The water from this reservoir is pumped 200 feet up, then lowered 100 feet. The canal is built at the level of the Don river. This scheme irrigates 1,200,000 acres of farm-land. There is a network of subsidiary canals here too. On the banks of the canal are gardens on level ground. We were told by the engineers who built it that the blueprint for this canal existed as early as the 17th century, at the time of Peter the Great. But until the time of the Socialist Revolution people who had vested interests in the railway stood against the scheme for the sole reason that it would affect the profits of the railway. After the Socialist Revolution a centuries-old wish of the people took concrete shape. I saw at a pumping station a machine that draws in small fishes from distant seas.

We saw only the canal that day. The following day we reached the Simiianskaya lake. It did not look like an artificial lake. Water stretched as far as the eye could see. A small sea with waves rising and falling. One could see many magnificent buildings and their gardens along the sea-shore. These buildings were constructed by the Government for those whose homes had been submerged by the water.

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The doctors examined me again when I returned after visiting Stalingrad and Volga-Don canal. They recommended that I should spend at least 2 weeks in a sanatorium. Comrade Hardev and I left for the sanatorium. We went to the Barvika sanatorium which was 25 miles away from Moscow.

Medical examinations began again. The doctors enquired about all my ailments since childhood. Treatment was prescribed in a week. With the new treatment old ailments reappeared. I was given a special diet in accordance with the sanatorium rules.

Life in the sanatorium was very pleasant. Each patient had to take some special exercises. Even bed-ridden patients had to take these exercises. As it was winter, the lake nearby was frozen. Children caught fish from crevices that they made in the ice which was as hard as stone. We used to go there for strolls. One could play and see films in the sanatorium.

The presence of smiling nurses, who worked all through the day and night looking after the comforts of patients, was a pleasant surprise. They were as proficient in medicine as doctors. Many of them were preparing for medical degrees. For every 24 hours work they would get 2 days off. During these 24 hours they would look after even the smallest needs of the patients. Seldom have I seen people so earnest about their work, so full of sympathy and tact. After my operation, they would tune in Indian music and news on the radio for my relaxation. Such heed to the likes and dislikes of individual patients was admirable. It was natural that their contented life would give them the ability, patience and readiness so necessary in their work. I learnt that nearly half of them

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became doctors later on in life. Indeed, they had the time and facilities for this. Any nation that emulates this system will be able to create the healthy atmosphere so necessary in hospitals.

I went to see the famed underground railway of Moscow while staying in this sanatorium. One could go anywhere in the city in these underground trains. The subway network had 40 stations in Moscow, each station with its own entrance. While at one station, one saw sculpture depicting scenes from patriotic wars, another station had pictures of costumes of different sections of the people and so on. I was told that these displays at railway stations had been arranged for those who were unable to visit museums.

I was able at this time to participate in the November 7 celebrations. I took part in the meeting held on November 6 at Bolshoi theatre. Comrade Stalin was there at this meeting. I took part, along with foreign diplomats, at the celebrations held the next day. I was seated close to Lenin's tomb with the diplomats sitting opposite. On the dais in front were Stalin and other leaders. The military parade alone took an hour and a half. The procession of people lasted nearly six hours. In the procession were members of the public, workers who had excelled in their work, model farmers, actors and writers. There were even little children who were most excited when the procession passed Stalin and other leaders. They were showing their abounding respect and love for the leaders who stood with them in their march from poverty and misery to plenty. I was thrilled by the love and oneness shown by the people towards those who worked for them.

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I presented Comrade Stalin with a silver trophy on behalf of the Indian Communist Party.

I returned to the sanatorium after the demonstration. On November 23 I had a sudden attack of pneumonia. What happened later is still a dream to me. I only remember that I was afflicted all of a sudden and taken immediately to the Kremlin hospital in Moscow and operated upon. I learnt later that there were fears for my life even after the operation. I had acute appendicitis as well as double pneumonia. Death was certain unless I underwent surgery. An operation was hazardous as I had double pneumonia. In the absence of any alternative, I was finally operated upon without anaesthetics. I suffered terrible pain. The operation lasted three hours. I lost consciousness after two hours. These things I learned later for then I was in a coma. I was in pain for a month and a half after the operation. As food particles came out through the stitches, these were reopened and allowed to heal on their own. This took three months. I survived only because of the great advances in medicine in the Soviet Union and the constant care of doctors and nurses. My body was riddled with ailments, old and new. The treatment for one ailment would aggravate another. Without medical care for a long time, the ailments had become acute. Curing me was a difficult task for the doctors. But they applied themselves to it with great earnestness. As it was very cold, I was removed after three months, to the Gagra sanatorium on the doctors' advice. On our way there we passed through Restov, Ukraine and Caucasus. There were 25 sanatoriums in that bewitching town. These sanatoriums for workers and other toiling people

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were fully equipped. My sanatorium was close to the sea. It was a fine health resort. Most of these sanatoriums were owned by trade unions and other institutions. They were used mainly as health resorts for workers.

I had occasion while in the sanatorium to see a Soviet election. The quietness of the election amazed me. There was no rush or scramble. People came, cast their votes, listened to music and watched films. Everything was normal. I found the candidate of a nearby constituency participating in a cultural programme near the booth I visited. It seemed incredible to me. When I talked to him, he told me, *I have told my voters what I had to say. I have worked for the country for a long time. I have kept the promises I made the last time I stood for elections. This time too I have told the voters what I will do in the future.* It is up to them to take a final decision. There is no point in pressurising them. This is why I am not visiting my constituency. I talked to some of the voters. *We vote for those who keep their word. We vote now for those who we know will keep their word. If they do not do so, we have the right to unseat them. Therefore, we are not afraid of electing anybody who seems promising.* An election devoid of rush and hurry, jockeying and violence was a new and fascinating experience for me.

My stay at Gagra helped restore my health. The mild sunshine, pleasant cold spells and strolls on the beach were all very agreeable and invigorating.

On the morning of March 3, Comrade Nikrasov informed us that Comrade Stalin was ill. The singing and merry-making gave way to sadness. I woke up a little late on the 6th. I was greeted by tearful eyes and a choking voice. Stalin was dead.

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With the doctor's permission I set out for Moscow at 4 o'clock with a doctor and three others. On the way I found pictures of Comrade Stalin displayed in all houses and shops. The photograph was framed with red flowers and black-bordered red flags. I found people from all walks of life were grief-stricken and felt that everyone had a broken heart. People streamed to Moscow in cars, planes, trains and on foot to pay their last homage to their leader.

We reached Moscow on the 8th. It was a changed Moscow. Columns of silent people. Mile-long queues all over the place. People had been standing for hours shivering in the biting cold. They were determined to have a last look at their leader, no matter how long they had to wait. An entire populace was streaming to Moscow. The flow of people lasted three nights and three days.

We entered the hall where the body lay, I passed to the next room after laying the garland that I had brought over the body of Stalin. I then stood with the guard of honour along with others. Later I secured a chair and sat close to the hearse watching the endless stream of people. The hall was full of flowers.

We went back to the Kremlin the next morning. The coffin was removed from the hall at 11:30pm Leaders, ministers, colleagues, foreign diplomats and others followed the coffin. Comrade Stalin's son was also there. The coffin was installed close to Lenin's tomb. The people dispersed in silence.

It was now nearly eight months since my arrival. The Party had cabled me that my return home was urgent. I visited a few more places before leaving. One of these was the

oldest textile factory in Russia, 145 years old. The first thing that one sees there is a monument for workers who fell in the October revolution. Nearby were photographs of model workers of the company. This was one of the special features that I noticed in China, Russia and other socialist countries. Whether it is the factory, school or hospital, the pictures of exemplary workers will be displayed prominently. This system that respected human labour and ability impressed me very much. To our eyes, accustomed to see only photographs of employers and not workers, this system was both appealing and thought-provoking.

This factory where 8,000 workers were employed has now only 6,000. But still production has increased by 40 per cent. Production is stepped up there, not by squeezing workers but by educating them, by awakening their patriotism and nationalism. A worker can rise to be Manager or Director. The workers are not afraid of managers. If the manager errs, the factory inspector elected by the union can fire him. The manager cannot dismiss workers except when the union decides to, after discussing the matter at a general body meeting.

Most of the workers were women. Healthy faces brimming with happiness. I thought for a moment about the women of our country who go to work in factories after leaving their little ones at home. The women in that factory which had nurses and kindergarten schools had no worries at all about their children. All big factories had poly-clinics, hospitals, night sanatoriums, rest-houses and summer resorts. This factory had a training school for the education of workers. Another one had an evening school, library and a cinema hall

accommodating 400 people. There was a night sanatorium with 19 doctors and 40 nurseries and accommodation for 1,000 persons. Workers are admitted there in batches, month by month, and given good treatment and diet under medical advice.

Many who had participated in the revolution were working in this factory. Two of the workers were members of the Supreme Soviet. 18 were members of the Moscow city Soviet. One Supreme Soviet member was a 42 year-old worker and a Stalin prize winner. He had the rank of lieutenant in the army. There were also some who had joined the factory before the revolution. I talked to a 60 year-old retired worker. He had joined the factory at 12. He worked hard for 3 years as apprentice on a wage of 18 kopeks (1 rouble = 100 kopeks). He later worked in the weaving department on a wage of 6 roubles. He had to starve at that time for weeks together. The wages were paid in kind from the factory owner's house. He now a pensioned worker. At the same time, he was working as head of a shop in the factory. His three daughters were working in various departments of the factory. One daughter was a graduate. His wife was a pensioner, but she still worked in the factory. I also visited the quarters where aged workers of the factory lived. I found a contented and active working community absolutely untouched by frustration.

I visited the office of the Communist paper *Pravda*. I talked to the editors. One could see here how a newspaper can become the mouthpiece of the people, responsive to all their wants. The newspaper office receives between 1,200 and 1,500 letters from the people. These letters deal with the

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Party, the Government, the administration of the paper and innumerable other subjects. As soon as they arrive, the letters are read and classified. Some are published in full. Some others are dealt with in editorial notes and humour columns. Some are sent to ministers, Party units and department heads. The newspaper office keeps a vigilant eye on whether the ministers are responding to these letters.

Similarly, the people were free to make personal representations at the office, which maintained a staff to hear such complaints. They would be contacted, complaints would be received in writing and attended to. Similarly, some 375 reporters would meet six or seven people daily and write to the paper about their complaints and criticisms.

When I was in Russia, the paper had a circulation of 3.5 million copies. I was told that the number of copies printed was not increased because paper was needed for other printing work. Schemes to produce more paper in the immediate future were pending at the time. It took 30 minutes to print these 3.5 million copies. They were then planning to get the work done in 10 minutes. My impression was that the newspaper office housed a movement of tremendous potential.

I went to Leningrad afterwards. I visited the Government museum of Russian art. It was housed in a building which was once the palace of King Michael. It was built at the end of the 14th century. One could see paintings, old ornaments and *ikons* of the 14th and 15th centuries. I saw there the largest oil painting in the world. It measured 70 square feet. I saw paintings depicting the history of the revolution, the age of the Czars and the system of forced labour. I was most attracted by

the lively canvases of Zurikov. Colourful pictures of human beings fighting for life at the lowest rung of life. There were in all 300,000 pictures displayed in 96 rooms.

I saw the fort of Peter and Paul near the Niva river the next day. It was Peter the Great who recovered this fortress from foreign invaders. It was at one time a jail where revolutionaries were interned. It is now a museum. Close by was Leningrad University. Lenin completed his education there. 2,500 pupils from 50 population groups studied there. Nearby was a very historic place. It was there that the first Congress of the Soviets was held in 1917. The monument of Nicholas I who was responsible for *Bloody Sunday* was still there. This was an example of how they preserve even an enemy's monument as a work of art.

We saw the winter palace too. There was a monument inside it that depicted the defeat of Napoleon. It was carved from a single block of stone that was 170 feet high and weighed 600 tons. This courtyard was an eye-witness of many historic events. It was there that *Bloody Sunday* was enacted. There was a pond near this palace. Lenin was taken to this pond as he alighted at Finland station on April 3.

We saw the graves of those who died in the war. The warship that participated in the Russo-Japanese war of 1900 was still berthed in the river. We went afterwards to the Terchiko palace. It was from here that Lenin wrote his famous April thesis. We saw the Smolensky Square also. That was where girls of families of the nobility used to study. Lenin led the revolution from Smolensky. Workers and soldiers marched from here to capture the winter palace.

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We visited the Garden of Victory built by workers, peasants and students. It was spread over 325 acres. Lenin had lived underground somewhere in the interior. There was a hut thatched with straw. Lenin's *Government and Revolution* was written in a forest near this hut. The utensils, chisel and tea-pot used by Lenin are all preserved here.

I then went on to Tashkent, a Muslim majority area. The topography of this place and the living habits of its people resembled some places in India. Many of them ate with their fingers and wore the *mundu* (*lungi*). I saw Muslim men and women employed in all fields of work and living in affluence. I thought of the plight of so many Muslim women in our country sighing behind the purdah, when I saw Muslim women of this country in such a wide variety of occupations, including government departments. What enthusiasm and service-mindedness they displayed. I went to a collective farm and ate with a Muslim family. They served me something that was similar to our Indian *biriyani*. I posed for photographs with them. They presented me with a woollen suit and hat. I went to the mosque there and talked to the Imam. He told me that there was complete religious liberty. I went to the local mosque and took photographs of the worship being conducted there.

I returned to Moscow. My presence was badly needed at home. The doctors examined me and allowed me to leave, although not with complete satisfaction. But they forbade me to travel by plane. They asked me to travel to China by train. I left for China in a special train in the company of a doctor and two helpers. We had a very pleasant journey.

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To travel across a country as diverse as Russia was at once exhilarating and profitable. At each station I encountered the costumes and language and other individual characteristics of that place. The costumes, languages, landscape and climate changed at every stage of the journey and this provided a delightful kaleidoscopic panorama to the eye. We reached the border of China in ten days. Chinese comrades were waiting there to receive us.

The doctor and his helpers returned. I continued the journey in the company of the Chinese comrades. To say the truth, I was sad to leave Russia. I felt as though I was bidding goodbye to friends and relatives. I had received during these past eight months so much affection and kindness. How deep was their feeling for India! With what care did they tend me when I was gravely ill! It is hard to believe that there are people who value human life so much.

I reached Peking in the company of the Chinese comrades and spent three or four days there. I had the opportunity of seeing the famous Chinese May Day parade during my stay. I encountered the workers, peasants and students of China who had achieved such phenomenal progress in such a short time. A vast concourse surging forward in a mood of unrestrained exuberation. China at that time was just coming into its own in many fields. But I saw already a populace brimming with self-confidence and optimism. The chief reason for China's success was the optimism about the future that it was able to instil in the people.

I reached Hong Kong by train from China and flew from there to Delhi. My tour abroad lasting eight months was at

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last at an end.

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In my absence, the anti-Communists had resorted to some interesting but deliberate propaganda methods. They propagated that I had been liquidated in Russia as I was not a Stalinist but one who opposed the Stalin line. Even reactionary newspapers showed a boundless regard for me at the time of my supposed martyrdom! The issue was even raised in Parliament. Even dedicated anti-Communists said in Parliament that I was after all a good man. They enquired about my whereabouts and expressed anxiety over what might have happened to me. This was only a signal for the circulation of false and specious rumours. They were later to spread far more reprehensible and mean stories about the Communist Party. Compared with what was to come, the propaganda then was mere child's play.

As far as the Party was concerned, it was a period of very important self-examination. Analysing the shortcomings and mistakes of 1948-50, the Party had begun moving in a new course. The Communist Party did handle the living problems of the people and stand with them in 1948-50. This was why, although guilty of mistakes, the Party was able to score many

victories in the elections held subsequently in Andhra, Kerala and other States in the face of ruthless oppression. The question that now agitated Party circles was whether or not we should participate in the parliamentary processes at all. Many extremist viewpoints were put forward. It therefore became necessary to evaluate the new responsibilities consequent on our electoral successes, and to decide our course of action, not losing sight of our overall objectives. As a result of this, the Party's third All-India session was held in Madurai. Hundreds of comrades from different parts of India participated in it. There were lively discussions and heated arguments. The meeting ended only after some definite decisions were taken. It was this conference that cleared the prevailing confusion of thinking and paved the way for definite action by comrades. The Conference decided to unite leftist forces throughout the country and to forge strong leftist unity against the Congress. The Madurai Congress marked the beginning of a new outlook and a new method of work.

There was a cabinet crisis in Travancore-Cochin not long after the Madurai Congress. There was increasing disunity inside the Congress and the Ministry collapsed without any pressure from outside. But although the Congress executive under Chief Minister Panampilly, which swore all the time in the name of democracy, resigned, it took refuge in certain constitutional niceties enunciated by Sir Ivor Jennings and continued as a caretaker government. It took this stand without so much as giving the Communist Party, Praja Socialist Party(PSP), RSP, and other opposition parties an opportunity to form a government. It took that course in order to cling to

power to enable it to rig the next elections by using the reins of office to this end. The Centre closed its eyes in approval of this nakedly anti-democratic action. When we raised this issue in Parliament, the Centre evaded it on the pretext that the State had sovereign powers in the matter. A new general election followed shortly.

The Communist Party contested it on the basis of a united front with the PSP, RSP, and Kerala Socialist Party (KSP). The people welcomed this move for leftist unity. But to the misfortune of the democratic movement in Kerala, the PSP, as it had done in the past, adopted a deceitful policy this time too. The PSP leadership which all this time had sworn by a united government, combined with the Congress and formed a PSP Ministry. But this union did not last long. The Congress which supported the government from the opposition benches toppled the PSP Ministry after 11 months when it was about to introduce land reforms and together with the Tamil Nadu Congress formed its own Ministry. The well-known Transport struggle and the Tamil Nadu crisis broke out during the PSP ministry. Both were suppressed. There was police firing in Tamil Nadu. The Congress brought down the PSP after thus isolating it from the people.

The Party was then giving leadership to the agitation for linguistic States that was taking shape throughout India. The struggle for Andhra State began. Potti Sriramulu started his fast. Nothing but the death of that courageous campaigner who had worked for the Congress all his life was able to open the eyes of the Congress. Andhra Pradesh was thus ushered in. With this began the struggle for Visalandhra, Kerala and

other linguistic states. The Ruling Party was forced to declare in Parliament that a commission would be appointed to study the issue and make a report. I toured the whole of India at this juncture and personally participated in this movement of different sections of the people.

Before long, an election was held in the new Andhra State. The Communist Party contested this election on its own. It would not be wrong to say that the experience in Travancore-Cochin dissuaded the Party from trying to forge unity with parties like the PSP. The Party contested nearly all the seats. I toured the length and breadth of Andhra during this election and participated in meetings. Thousands of ordinary peasants and other people participated in these meetings. I found increasing enthusiasm there at that time. It was even thought that the Party might win a majority. But the election results were a disappointment. The Party did not win a majority. Although the Party was able to rally the peasants and common people, it failed to win over the middle class. The Ruling Party succeeded in confusing and mis-guiding them. They even went to the extent of circulating *Pravda* articles about Nehru and India to discredit us. We failed to bring home the Party's domestic and foreign policies and the role it had played in developing India's policy of world peace. We failed also to dispel the confusion of ideas and to face the constant threats and inducements from opponents. One of the primary reasons for our electoral failure was over-confidence.

The Congress Ministry in Travancore-Cochin collapsed once again in 1955, because of internal disunity. The Communist Party and other opposition parties declared themselves

ready to form an alternative ministry. Although the *Rajpramukh* was presented with a document signed by a majority of legislators, opposition leader T.V Thomas was not allowed to form a ministry. President's rule was proclaimed.

In the meantime, the struggle for *Aikya* Kerala had been intensified. The possibility that progressive forces would capture power on this platform forced the reactionaries to plead for a Southern State. Concerned over this possibility, a large section in the Congress started campaigning for a Southern State. They wanted the Southern State to comprise of Kerala, Madras and Karnataka. But they were afraid of the masses. Precisely for this reason, they were unable to reach a consensus between themselves. Mr. Kamaraja Nadar in particular fought shy of speaking out boldly. The pleas for a Southern State only served to intensify the movement for *Aikya* Kerala both within and outside. As often in the past, Malayalees living outside Kerala played a large part in this. *Aikya* Kerala conferences were held in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. I personally have shared the closest association with Malayalees outside Kerala. I have approached them as a Congressman, a Socialist and as a Communist. On all occasions, they have made signal contributions to the people's cause in Kerala. Both in kind and in cash they have contributed liberally to any demands made on them on all those occasions. The co-operation of Malayalees living in Ceylon, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Ahmedabad and Poona is indeed indescribable. Not only to me but to all public workers from home do they extend their helping hand in the interests of the country and regardless of the political parties to which they belong. One

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of the things of which I am ever proud is that wherever he is, the Malayalee will always stand by the progressive forces existing there. He will also invariably speak with pride about his motherland and its culture, and is always ready to extend to it all the assistance at his command. We can be sure that he will keep doing this.

This loyalty of the Malayalees outside Kerala played a significant role in creating the popular movement for *Aikya* Kerala. It would not be wrong to conclude that this section can always be counted upon as a prop and support to Kerala.

There were demonstrations and meetings throughout the state when the States Reorganisation Commission visited Kerala. There were pitched demonstrations at the site selected for hearings by the Commission. Intense campaigning commenced throughout the state but did not succeed in curbing the activities of reactionary forces.

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The report of the States Reorganisation Commission was out even before the Palghat conference. The Commission had approved of United Tamil Nadu, Visalandhra, *Aikya* Kerala and *Aikya* Karnataka. But the Commission was not prepared to endorse the principle of linguistic states. Moreover, linguistic states like Maha Gujarat and Samyukta Maharashtra ceased to exist. There was intense opposition to this in Parliament. There was trouble within the Congress cabinet itself. Sri Deshmukh, the Minister, resigned. There was mass agitation at the same time. The authorities resorted to firing and prohibitory orders were enforced without any discrimination in Bombay. Leaders like Dange were arrested. The agitation continued through all these events and beyond. The Party sent me to Bombay to make a personal study of the situation there. Comrade M. N. Govindan Nair, H. V. Kamath and I left for Ahmedabad on August 9.

We learnt from newspapers the next morning of firing and curfew orders, and we could more or less imagine the situation in Ahmedabad. The agitators crowded all the railway stations near Ahmedabad. They entered our room without

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any hesitation and explained all the events that had taken place in the city. They wanted to know why the Gujarat MPs were absent and why they had not come with us. They informed us that angry mobs had stoned the house of their MP, Sri Thulasidas Kilachand. Both old and young were angry and depressed. Our next station was Kalol. Three persons had died there the previous day, the victims of the police firing. They told us that clashes between the people and police still continued. They wanted to us alight there on our return journey and assess the situation. There was with them an ardent young man from South India called Krishna Moorthy. He spoke to us in Tamil on behalf of these organised young men.

We reached Ahmedabad at 8:30pm There was firing and curfew there every day. A large crowd, including Socialist leader Amul Desai, the Socialist Party Secretary and the Communist Party Secretary, was waiting for us at the station. This surprised us as we did not expect anyone to receive us at the station. After consultations, Kamath and I left for different destinations. It was 10pm There was nobody on the road. The police were patrolling at random. We managed to reach Bhulabhai colony. The next morning M.N and I went to the house of the Socialist Party Secretary. Kamath was camping there. We planned our programme. We tried first to get a permit from the District Magistrate. We did not succeed. We were warned that we would be violating the curfew. It was announced immediately afterwards that the curfew would be in force only after 6pm We moved in accordance with a plan. We decided to visit the families of those who had died in the

firing. We found people waiting for us everywhere. It was difficult on account of the crowds to walk on the road. Each person we met started telling us about his experiences. They urged us to make a public statement. We told them that we had come not to make speeches, but to study the situation. But they did not relent. Socialist MLA Amul Desai finally spoke on behalf of us all. We wandered thus from street to street. We found many empty tins of tear-gas. We visited the places where there had been firing and the houses of those killed. Curfew on one side, and tear gas, *lathi charges* and police patrolling on the other—but still the people had not lost their morale and courage. It was an amazing experience.

The general impression is that Gujaratis are quiet and peace-loving. This agitation showed that this was a childish and baseless impression. The leadership of this agitation was in the hands of students and the youth. Workers did not participate in its leadership, although a section of them took part in the agitation itself. The Ahmedabad workers had been weaned away from such political movements by the Congress. The working class therefore was unable to participate fully in this political event. This happened to be the movement's big weakness. A section of mill owners were in favour of the Maha Gujarat movement. A novel feature was that they closed down the mills and forced the workers to participate in the agitation. It was not a movement in which other sections were mobilised under the leadership of the working class. It was a movement led by students and the middle class in which the workers participated only because of the encouragement of mill owners and all other sections of society. There was

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another novel feature. The big mill owners would announce the names of those who had fallen in police firings in the newspapers, in a column captioned *Tearful Homage*. This was something that had not occurred in any other agitation.

There was nothing like it in the recent past in point of unity and strength. Although the movement suffered from the lack of a proper leadership, it had several organisational advantages. A massive signature campaign was launched with immense success. Young students waited at railway stations and in the streets to collect signatures, among them even boys of 8 and 10 years old. They would intercept cars and only let them proceed when told that the occupants had signed already. About 500 students from a village called Anand went to the surrounding areas to instruct the local inhabitants about their duties.

We were able to visit only five or six places. Learning of our arrival, the people started writing and telephoning to the office of the Socialist and Communist Parties. The police became alert. By the morning of the 12th a police van and five or six hirelings were ready to follow us. We visited many places that day too and talked to people. It was difficult to move about in the dense crowd. Something happened in the meantime. Four or five friends came running and asked us to quickly move to the next street. We went there. A young SAP man was found sitting on the verandah in a narrow street with a pointed gun. He had given a five-minute warning to the inhabitants. If they did not get inside their homes and close the doors within the allotted time, he would shoot them. We went to that young man who was sitting there like a hero

ready to kill people. We talked to him. We asked him what he was doing. *I have been given powers to shoot anybody*, he replied. Young SAP men were thus let loose on the streets. They would provoke the people. Little boys sometimes would shy stones at them from balconies and provoke them in turn. Such was the explosive situation that prevailed.

The people invited us to a curfew area. We said, *We shall come later*. They did not like this reply. *Who is going to respect the curfew?* they rejoined sharply.

The students observed the 13th as Martyrs' Day. We visited many places that day too, though curfew prevailed throughout the area. But no one paid heed to it. There were processions all the day. At 10 o'clock we were passing through an area in the city where nearly 5,000 people had thronged. They would not let us go. They erected a platform in the centre of the road with packing boxes and asked us to speak from there. Amul Desai spoke. Kamath and I climbed on to the platform, shouted *Maha Gujarat Zindabad* and left. Processions of 500 and 1,000 women marched through the streets. A meeting was held in the evening under the auspices of the students' council. 1,50,000 attended. All processions went up to the Congress headquarters and placed flowers at the spot where the firing had taken place and returned. Such mammoth processions and demonstrations have never been held in the recent past. At the same time *lathi-charges* and tear gas attacks were launched in several parts of the city.

I spoke to many prominent people and Party representatives, among them Indulal Yagnik. I told them that the movement would collapse if nothing was done at the organ-

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isational level. Attempts to form the *Maha Gujarat Samithi* were then in progress.

We set out for Baroda from Ahmedabad. We toured Baroda from 10am Amul Desai, Kamath and Jindu Desai were arrested that evening. They were charged with violation of curfew and brought before the magistrate and the hearing was posted for the 16th.

I was present in the court on the 16th. The Magistrate wanted to know who I was. *My name is A.K Gopalan. I am not yet under arrest*, I told the magistrate. The magistrate and others smiled. The case was rejected after hearing. As Kamath wanted to raise some constitutional points, the case against him was adjourned.

I toured all the trouble spots in Baroda that day. The *lathi charge* here was terrible. Police were brought from Maharashtra to commit atrocities here. *Do you want Bombay? Take*, said one policeman shamelessly while beating the people. The attack was truly inhuman. We saw girls of 10 and 12 injured in the police attack while coming home with milk or returning from the market.

In the meantime, I went to a place called Kalol. As we went to the town in a procession, we found a lone man shouting slogans in Malayalam. He finally approached us and said; *Sir, I am from Ponnani. We are five Malayalees here. We are beedi workers*. I was suddenly conscious that I was a Malayalee. Pride swelled up in my heart. Fellow Keralites may be poor and hungry. But they are educated and progressive. Wherever they are, they will be in forefront of struggles against oppression and for democratic rights. Mother Kerala, you

are blessed. Your sons will never be cowards. They will preserve your honour and self-respect. Of those arrested first at Ahmedabad, three were Malayalees. Gopalakrishnan of Poona and 16 other Malayalees have undergone imprisonment in the struggle for Samyukta Maharashtra.

My companions and I assembled in a hall after touring the affected areas. I requested my audience to strengthen the organisation and continue the agitation. I concluded with the slogan *Maha Gujarat Zindabad*.

The police bandobust became very strong by the 16th. A small van and two vanloads of police were following me. It was a large procession. I toured some areas in the outskirts of Kalol on the 16th. I talked to the people and studied the situation. People started streaming to the party office. They handed us a petition signed by thousands. Those who had never been to the Party office before nor even heard of it came there after finding out the way.

I booked a ticket to go to Delhi via Bombay at 4:30pm on the 17th. I decided to visit as many places as possible on that day. There was great unrest in the city by that time. Morarji Desai was arriving in the city on the 19th. A vigorous propaganda for a people's curfew and boycott of his meeting had been launched well ahead of his arrival.

There was a novel programme in the city. Donkeys of washermen were painted white and let loose in the city with caps on their ears and the words *Morarji Murdabad* scrawled on them. These donkey processions were organised throughout the city. When Amul Desai and I were going in a car, a boy stopped us and pointing to one of these animals told

Amul Desai, *Look, here goes your uncle*. There was another programme at night throughout the city. Groups of fifty to a hundred women would walk along the streets singing and beating their chests. This is usually done when someone dies.

The special feature of this struggle was that from beggars right up to mill owners everyone raised slogans advocating Maha Gujarat and hatred of the Congress and Morarji who were against it. It was difficult to judge whether these were really political demands. Anyway, students and the young showed a deep political sense. It was not a question of mere excitement. They displayed a definite political awareness. But we had our own doubts as to how the movement would develop in the absence of a well-founded organisation. Forces tending towards a disintegration of the national fabric were strongly felt at that time. They tried to dissipate the force of the agitation by claiming that the whole thing was engineered by the Socialist and Communist Parties which then had only a small following in Bombay. But members of the Congress committee and municipality were obliged by the force of popular feeling to resign.

At 3 o'clock on the 17th we visited the house of a martyr named Jayagnilal. Jayagnilal was killed by a shot from behind as he was returning from work through a curfew-free area and after the police had already examined his pass and allowed him to proceed. He was survived by his widow and two children. The first of the children was undergoing the final year of schooling. The inhabitants of the locality collected 6,000 rupees for the family. I went from there to Jamalnagar and Maninagar. While returning to the Party office, somebody

stopped my car and told me that I was wanted by the DSP. I replied that I had no business with the DSP and that if he wanted to see me, he should come to me. I went to the Party office. The DSP and company came and arrested me. I was presented before the magistrate at 8pm and was taken to the Sabarmati prison.

Although a Parliament member, my experience in prison was the same as before. I was lodged among those who had been sentenced to death. There were six of them in that block. Three were working there. Two who had been sentenced to death were waiting for the result of mercy petitions to the President. The sixth was a prosecution witness in a case in which a person was beaten to death by a sub-Inspector and others on the pretext of extracting evidence. These were my companions. The rest was as before.

The arrest angered me very much. There was a real man-hunt going on in Ahmedabad. I was arrested as part of this man-hunt. The Government did not order a judicial enquiry. I told the magistrate that I would go on a hunger-strike in protest against the Government's policy and for a judicial enquiry, and proceeded to do so forthwith.

I met my companions in jail one by one. Sure enough there was a Malayalee. A certain Thomas of Trivandrum. He had left his home at the age of 12 because of ill-treatment at the hands of his step-mother. He went to Delhi from Madras in the company of one Mahadeva Iyer and stayed there for three years. He worked afterwards in a hotel in Bombay. When Prohibition came he took up the work of bringing illicit liquor to the city. He was imprisoned four times. This was his fifth

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term. His pseudonym was Ram Vithal Shetty, but everyone used to call him Shetty. He had been to many jails and had everywhere reported on the corrupt practices of wardens and officials to the Government. The authorities gave him a job as informer in their embarrassment. He was paid 5 annas a day, and had the designation of night watchman.

Among those sentenced to death was a young man of 22. He had killed a policeman in a clash with the police. He looked happy. He was allowed to walk handcuffed in front of his cell for 30 minutes at 2 o'clock every day. He would then give a smiling salute. But I could not talk to him as I did not know his language.

Ramul who was also under the death sentence was a clever fellow. He did look like a murderer. He had killed someone whom he suspected of being his wife's lover. He was jailed for five years for that. His wife gave birth shortly after his arrest. When he returned from jail he killed the boy suspecting his parentage. He was now in jail for that. The High Court rejected his appeal. When the wardens asked him to pray to God, he replied: *Why should I? Why should I disturb God? Let him rest.*

We could hear from inside the jail the echoes of the agitation outside. We could hear the slogan of *Maha Gujarat Zindabad*. The wardens shared our views of the desirability of a separate Gujarat State. There was a convict warden named Patel. He was very kind to me. He would even forget to eat when he heard *Maha Gujarat Zindabad*. Patel did not know how to read or write. When someone read newspapers he would sit nearby and listen. At the end he would say *Maha*

Gujarat.

The jail life did not bother me as I was not new to it. I believe that jails in Bombay are better than others. Exercise was compulsory after the morning's ablutions. Everyone went to work after that. All those sentenced to over three months were paid. There were 19 *beedi*-rollers there at that time. They made enough *beedis* for the prisoners. They were paid a rupee and 11 annas each. A portion of it was kept in reserve to be paid at the time of release or to be sent home. The rest was paid to cover personal needs in jail. They were given 16 coupons of one rupee each, and bought what they wanted with these coupons. There was a jail canteen. Tea and tiffin were served from there to the prisoners' blocks twice a day. In addition, a lorry brought *beedis*, cigarettes, matches, sweets, jaggery and green chillies every day. Meat and vadaï were available on Sundays. These would be sent to those who wished to buy them with their coupons. There was, therefore, no scramble for *beedis* and tea. Even clothes were available there. Prisoners with a good record were taken outside for entertainment. Some even won prizes in matches outside. Plays would be staged on holidays like August 15 and January 26. The prisoners were on parole for 15 days a year. At the end of the parole, they had to return. They shared in the jail administration. Members were elected by ballot from among the prisoners. These members discussed reforms in jail administration with the Superintendent. These jails were very different from those in Madras. But it was difficult to put all these reforms into practice. There was foul play even here. But it was certainly a welcome reform that those who

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worked were paid and had the facility of buying *beedis*, tea, soap and other essentials with the money.

Next to my room was the room where Mahatma Gandhi had stayed in 1922. It was preserved in his memory. Mahatmaji's photograph, a *charkha*, and some books were all there and on the front wall some quotations from Mahatmaji's books. On a polished plank fixed to the room's wall was written *The room where Mahatmaji stayed in 1922*. Every morning I used to get flowers from the jail garden and decorate the room. The jail authorities have suggested to the Government that the whole block be kept free of prisoners and preserved as a historic site. Anyway, living near this room was exciting.

A meeting was arranged for Morarji on the 19th evening. There was turmoil outside on this account. There was a stir even inside. Elaborate arrangements were made at the Lal Sarhaja maidan. But the *Maha* Gujarat students council enforced the people's curfew in the morning itself. A week in advance the people had been placed under curfew regulations. But the People's Committee exhorted the people not to attend Morarji's meeting. The roads were full of slogans asking the people not to attend the meeting and wishing Morarji *murdabad*. Boys and girls stopped cars and buses and appealed to the people. The *hartal* was complete. Morarji realised that the meeting would be a failure. He knew that this movement could not be contained through *lathi-charges* and firings. A very few people including CID men turned up in the evening for the meeting. There could have been no greater discomfiture for a Chief Minister. Morarji went on fast. He announced

that the fast would continue until he was allowed to speak, until people came to hear him. The people did not care. The students held a meeting the next day. More than 100,000 people attended. Other Ministers and Deputy Ministers started arriving in Ahmedabad on account of the fast. But they did not get a good reception from the people. The people started referring to Congress House as *Slaughter House*. People who went to see the Ministers were shot at. Students became martyrs. The people's hatred for Congressmen flared up.

The local magistrate decided to take up our case on the 23rd instead of the 24th. It was the sixth day of my fast. As soon as I entered the court, lawyers and the magistrate requested me to break the fast. The lawyers and leading citizens asked me to terminate the fast as the people had themselves taken up the question of a judicial enquiry into the police firing. I broke the fast. The court premises were filled with people who were interested in hearing the case. The glass panes of the window were broken in the rush. The case was put off until the next day because of the crowd. I went to the court on the 24th. Crowds waited inside and outside the court shouting slogans. It was impossible to carry on with the hearing. The Magistrate tried a ruse. He announced that the case was adjourned for the next day. They took me out in a van. I came back after a two hour jay ride around the city. But the people saw through the trick. All efforts made by the police to send them away proved futile. They shouted slogans like *Release Gopalan, Maha Gujarat Zindabad*. The case was heard with the greatest of difficulty, the proceedings being barely audible. The hearing was resumed the next day. The

public were kept out. Students and others shouted slogans from outside. Thousands of people thus kept shouting slogans continuously for three hours.

S.K Patil and others arrived on the scene and made arrangements for Morarji's meeting. At the same time, *goondas* were hired to throw stones. It was a conspiracy to smother the movement in violence and *goondaism*. Morarji's meeting was accompanied by stone throwing. Newspapers started writing about violence. The opportunists in the movement started backing out on the plea of violence. Communists were arrested in an effort to prove that they were responsible for the violence. Students too were arrested. To win the esteem of the people, all those who had resigned got into the Congress through the backdoor.

The case was posted for judgment on the 6th. The case for the prosecution was argued by the Ahmedabad Bar Association and prominent local lawyers like Pandubai Desai, C.K Shah, and Sant Trivedi argued the case for the defence. Pandubai's arguments took up six hours. Through this case, the local lawyers were only fulfilling their duty to defend civic liberties when they were being trampled underfoot. All Gujarati-language newspapers carried reports of the hearing. But English newspapers omitted them completely. This was done under Morarji's special instructions. Such was the much vaunted Bombay 'Democracy'. The judgment was pronounced on the 6th. I was released unconditionally. Everyone congratulated me. I thanked Pandubai Desai and other lawyers who had defended me. A huge crowd waiting outside welcomed me with gusto. I promised that I would speak at

the meeting scheduled for the following day. I went to the jail to pick up my luggage.

On release from jail, I toured the whole of Gujarat. In spite of the agitation, the Congress Government was not willing to accept the principle of linguistic states. They made the lame excuse that linguistic states would undermine the unity of India. Actually it was this attitude that sowed the seeds of disunity among the people. Had the ruling Party been willing to reorganise states with the village as the basic entity, as suggested by the Communist Party, national unity would have been strengthened and the feelings of different sections of the people respected. It is ridiculous to ignore the diversified culture existing in India and to pay heed only to the unity underlying that diversity. Nothing but a recognition of that diversity can strengthen the unity of India. The sooner the ruling Party realises this, the better can they cement the unity of India.

The report of the States Reorganisation Commission was implemented with some minor modifications not long after it was out. Most states got the linguistic provinces they wanted. In the rest of the country, the agitation continued in one form or other.

Along with other states *Aikya* Kerala came into being on November 1, 1956. President's rule was in force in Kerala at that time. There was rejoicing all over the country.

In February-March, 1957 the Second General Election was held in the reorganised states. The Congress, PSP and Communists were the principal political parties that took part in them. Communal parties like the Jan Sangh also par-

ticipated. In addition, the RSP participated in Bengal and Kerala, and in Madras and other States, the DMK and the organisations formed by Congress defectors.

The Communist Party had a good record of five years of Parliamentary and Assembly work to place before the people. Although Communist members were participating in such programmes for the first time, and although they were inexperienced in administrative matters, they were able to bring the country's problems before the people and to wage a relentless struggle against injustice. They had fulfilled this duty in a creditable way even while keeping within the strict limits of parliamentary democracy. On the basis of the lessons of this experience and detailed discussions at all levels in the Party, the All-India leadership hoped to take up the reins of office in Kerala and Bengal and to form a strong opposition in other states.

Although the Communist Party was ready for large-scale groupings with other parties, it was not possible to forge left-ist unity in Kerala. The exaggerated claims of the RSP and PSP hindered this. But an understanding between these parties was arrived at in Bengal. The Communist Party faced a difficult election in Kerala. The goal of all other parties in effect was to defeat the Communist Party, although the PSP and RSP preached anti-Congressism, they saw then in the Communist Party a greater enemy than the Congress. A brazen propaganda campaign of lies was carried out throughout Kerala against the Communist Party. This included the developments in Hungary and Russia.

Their perverse and false propaganda came out in naked

form in my constituency of Kasaragod. The Congress had no official candidate there. They desisted from fielding a candidate only because they wanted to see me defeated at any cost. The Communist Party did not have a strong following at that time in most parts of this constituency. There were many places where no public activity of any sort had occurred before. There were thousands of illiterate, impoverished and starving people there. Some villages were as far away as 10 and 20 miles from the road. This constituency included only a part of the constituency from which I was returned last time with a huge majority. The election campaign here was an uphill task for the Party. In many places, election propaganda also marked the inception of the movement. The alliance of the Congress, PSP, Muslim League (also called League) and RSP was determined to see me defeated. Capitalist supporters of the alliance made their presence felt. Nehru was brought down as speaker. It was significant that Sri Nehru who had all along pictured the Muslim League as a museum piece forgot his description of this party when he came to my constituency. Even Muslim women in purdah who had never previously participated in elections were brought out and made to vote.

Even after the election, congressmen sincerely hoped that I would lose. They made arrangements in all corners of Kerala to celebrate my defeat. Preparations for firework displays were made in major towns. Blinded by political hatred, my enemies even made effigies of me, my wife and our little daughter to be set afire during the celebration. But the awakened people of Kerala frustrated them. The enemies who were waiting to celebrate my defeat and thus to demoralise the

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comrades and sway the election in other constituencies slunk away as my victory was officially announced.

My victory was to be the harbinger of a long series of victories. Within a week, news came of the victory of Party candidates and the Party's independents in such numbers as to give the Communist Party the right to rule Kerala. For the first time in India, the Communist Party came into power through election. This victory of the Communist Party had world-wide repercussions and was hailed as an achievement for the world Communist movement. On that day diminutive Kerala attracted world-wide attention.

The Ministry that was formed under the leadership of Comrade EMS became an object of study not only for Communists but even for anti-Communists.

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I travelled abroad in 1957 and 1958. The first of my tours was in connection with the Afro-Asian Conference held at Cairo. On this occasion, in addition to Egypt, I visited France, Italy, London, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The other was when I went to Moscow in 1958 for medical treatment. On that occasion I visited Poland and Bulgaria. It will be instructive to describe my experience during these two tours.

I left for Cairo on December 24, 1957 along with the Indian delegation to participate in the Afro-Asian Conference. We started at 7pm but our plane returned because of engine trouble and it was 11pm when we resumed the flight from Santa Cruz airport.

We reached Cairo at 8 o'clock the next morning. A vast concourse was waiting at the airport to receive us. The atmosphere echoed with slogans on Indo-Egypt friendship. We stayed at the Semirias hotel, where the tariff was quite high.

The Conference sessions were held at the University hall. There were delegates from 50 countries. The President was Alana Sadiq, President of the Egyptian Committee and Deputy Leader of Parliament. There were people of diverse opinions

among the delegates.

The Indian delegation was led by Srimati Rameshwari Nehru. Sardar Trilok Singh, one of the members, struck the people of Cairo with wonder with his tall stature and flowing beard.

The delegates read a report on their respective countries. Certain issues came out in bold relief. The eagerness to cement the ties of friendship among Afro-Asian nations was clear everywhere. The conference clearly demonstrated the strong desire for peace among the peoples of the world. It expressed itself strongly against all kinds of aggression.

If one leaves Egypt without seeing the Pyramids, one of the seven wonders of the world, one misses the perspective of the great relics of feudal times built by the kings of long ago with the sweat and blood of slaves. The pyramids were built with the forced labour of people from all parts of Egypt. Hundreds of people flock to see it even today, forgetting its gory past. The museum, replete with treasures of bygone eras of Egyptian history, was even more engrossing and exciting.

There was a newly-constructed city there. It stood atop a hill. From it one had a view of the whole of Cairo. At night, in the dim light of neon lamps, Cairo appeared as though sleeping under a blanket.

Egypt is in ferment today. There is intense feeling against imperialism. The new generation is going forward in a hurry towards a more equitable socio-political system. Egypt is convinced that Asian nations must stand together to resist imperialistic designs.

We spent nearly thirty minutes with Egypt's leader Nasser

who charmed us with his attractive personality.

A day after the Conference ended, we set out to see the Suez Canal. The route was thronged by people who gave us bouquets of flowers.

On the morning of January 4, I reached Rome with Comrade Kali Mulla. We were impatient to see the city as soon as we reached the hotel after the inevitable passport check. Rome is the city of fountains. It is also a city famous for the most magnificent historic buildings, each one an architectural masterpiece.

As I entered Vatican City, the home of the Pope, the Supreme representative of the Catholic Church, I remembered his bitter hostility towards Communism. I took four hours to wander round the Basilica there which was full of wonderful pieces of sculpture. It is rather ironical that the earthly representative of Christ, who wanted human beings to share their bread with the hungry, lives in an opulent palace, gorged with the most expensive objects wrought from gold and precious stones and guarded by his own police force.

I went the next day to the nearby villages. I spent some time in the office of the Communist Party and the peasant union. I still remember the words of an old granny at the office, *Come again when our mulberry trees bear fruit.*

The main crop is grape. Wine is manufactured from the grapes. Agitations for land and for permanent rights in land have taken place here too. Italian peasants fought against eviction for 13 years. Two governments fell on this issue. A law banning eviction is now in force.

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From Italy we went to Paris, where International peasant leader Kerolil and colleagues were waiting for us. France has a strong peasant movement. Anti-eviction agitations have taken place here also. Farming here is on a more extensive scale than in Italy as it is mechanised. They have well realised the need for co-operative societies.

In Paris, the city of fashion, we had to reserve tickets in advance to see a cabaret. What we saw was a promenade of nakedness. An atmosphere of ribaldry and coarse enjoyment prevailed. Each country has its own culture and traditions, all facets of which may not appeal to others. But I felt after seeing this nude cabaret and a night club the next day that another person's impression need not be wrong and need not tally with mine.

But Paris is beautiful. The most beautiful city in the world!

When I arrived in London from Paris, representatives of Indian students greeted us. There was strict checking at the airport customs lounge, particularly as I had with me some books by Nasser. We were guests of the Indian students. They arranged a busy programme including a press conference. After the public meeting in the evening, we went sight-seeing. Those who have seen Bombay may not find much to see in London, but then again different people see the same place or thing with different eyes.

We spoke at several meetings. Members of all our audiences asked questions about Kerala.

I was invited to a tea party given by the Secretary of the Commonwealth Journalists Association for Gaitskell who had just returned from a Commonwealth tour. This gave me the

opportunity of meeting Gaitskell.

I did not have much time to spend in London. The little time I had was spent in public meetings, group meetings of students and press conferences.

I planned my itinerary in Czechoslovakia even before reaching there from London. I stayed at the International Hotel in Prague. I went to see the village of Slukov 17 miles away from Prague. Farmers there work in factories after the harvest.

Education is compulsory up to the age of eleven. After eight years of schooling, a student can join a technical school. Even those engaged in other work must attend school. Schooling and occupation oriented training are simultaneously inculcated. Many factories have their own schools. I visited the agricultural cooperative nearby and keenly observed its method of operation.

When I enquired about the advantages they get from co-operatives, I got the following reply. A person working in the co-operative has more income than the individual cultivator. It could be as much as three times. No one who has joined such a farm has left it. That itself shows how useful the co-operative is.

The members of the farm knew about India. They knew much about Nehru, India's policy of peace and the five principles of co-existence.

We visited the famous Gotwald museum afterwards. It was a beautiful three-storeyed building. One could learn from it the whole history of the revolution. The first thing that one sees is the emblem of the revolutionary movement of the 15th

century. One learns here too about the counter-revolution staged in 1948 by reactionaries. I felt sad and ashamed that even years after India's independence we have not been able to establish a historical museum of this type.

I have not seen anywhere else an equivalent emphasis on the liberation of women and the resultant evidence of their abilities. They were equal to men in all fields, such as in agriculture, industry and education and a host of others. A new life, a new outlook, happy people and a government for the people—this was what I saw in Czechoslovakia.

Even before I started out from India I had told myself that I would visit Hungary. Hungary was a trump card against the Communist Party in the 1957 election. I had made up my mind then that I would find out from the people there what had happened at that time. There was a heavy mist when we started from Prague for Budapest. Though it hindered visibility, it was kind to the many people waiting for us at the airport with garlands and bouquets.

Budapest is an attractive city built on the slope of a hill. Until 1872, there were two cities named Buda and Pest. Budapest became one city in 1872. A fortress built in 1851 by Stephen I of Hungary stood atop the tallest hill in the city. This was the venue of national festivals. The monument to national martyrs erected by the renowned artist Paltditross stood on the southern side of the fort.

The two cities comprising Budapest were linked by eight bridges over the Danube river. The Germans reduced Budapest during the Second World War to a funereal desert. The Red army entered it with medicines, clothes and food.

Peace returned to the people.

The Party in command in Hungary is Marxist-Leninist. Laws are enacted by representatives of the working class. The National Council consists of 289 members. 63 per cent of them are members of the Communist Party. Most of the others are drawn from progressive sections of *bourgeois* parties. The Council at its first meeting elects its President, Vice-President and six Secretaries. This Council rules when the Parliament is not in session. But Parliament is still supreme.

As I understood it, the main reason for the counter-revolution that took place there was that the government was divided into two antipathetic groups. Even after the country's liberation, anti-social forces existed in certain places. The Rakosi regime not only failed to isolate them but made several administrative mistakes. The Nagi group treacherously spread confusion right inside the Party. Along with this, the imperialist forces assisted the counter-revolutionaries from outside. But the Soviet Union helped at the right time. But for this, even the freedom of the Hungarian people would have been imperilled. What were the Party's mistakes? Instead of dealing with problems objectively, individual Party functionaries approached the people on a personal basis. The Party swayed far too much to the left and right without taking into account the historical background and real needs of the country.

The Party was unable to educate the people against reactionary thinking and the fascist thinking that still existed in independent Hungary as a consequence of 25 years of fascist rule. As a result of this failure the fascists were able to

strengthen themselves and infiltrate among the masses. The work among peasants and workers was affected. It was too late when the Party realised all its shortcomings and confessed its mistakes. Counter-revolution was advertised by its protagonists as a national struggle. It was not immediately possible to mobilise the working class against them. The fascist forces inched forward with the greatest caution. The Party not only failed to foresee this and educate the people but was hamstrung by its own ideological confusion. Communist writers like Tibod wrote openly about the Party's mistakes. The counter-revolutionaries used this too to their advantage.

The painful reality of the Hungarian crisis was that the Nagi group and the reactionary forces were able to foil the Party's efforts to correct its mistakes. It is some consolation that although the counter-revolutionaries killed 3,000 Communists, they were unable to torpedo the socialist system and the Party itself.

I visited many important factories and co-operative farms during my short stay of four days. Chief among these was a famous factory started by Germans in 1857 which makes machinery, glass articles, clocks, cameras and entire steam engines. I understood from my talks with the workers that they were already fully convinced of the necessity to correct the mistakes of the past and to work relentlessly for the nation's welfare.

The iron and steel factory at Esseppel attracted me most. 32,000 people worked there—an index of the scale of production and efficiency of the factory. I also visited Cappola Nashinak, a large co-operative farm. Such farms have given a

tremendous boost to agricultural production in Hungary. I went finally to the recently built town of Stalinovaras. The town was designed by engineers trained in the Soviet Union. It was built with Soviet help. *Does the progress of this town in the course of seven years outpace the seven wonders of the world?* I wondered to myself.

I arrived in Prague from Hungary on January 20 and flew to Bombay from there, via France, in a Swiss plane.

I undertook yet another foreign tour before the Amritsar session of the Party in 1958. As a result I could not attend the Amritsar session. I fainted all of a sudden one day while the Central Executive meeting was going on and was taken immediately to hospital. I was therefore only able to attend the public meeting at the end of the session. The Amritsar session proved a historic one. The developments that occurred after the Session are an index of its importance.

The Party decided to send me abroad for treatment and rest. Susheela and our little daughter Laila accompanied me this time. Ajoy Ghosh and Mrs. Ghosh travelled along with us. We spent a day at Prague and reached Moscow the following day. Doctors examined me as usual. My old medical records were all there. These were examined and new tests were made. I finally left for Burvika sanatorium in the company of Susheela and our daughter for rest and treatment. It was the same place where I had convalesced two years earlier. As Susheela and the child were there with me, we stayed this time in a small cottage. There were nurses to look after Laila. Susheela and I would go for a stroll in the morning. We met many people who had come there from various countries.

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One had lost his legs in the war. He was engaged the whole day in fishing. He was an editor of the Russian encyclopaedia. He sat on a chair catching fish by casting his line in all directions. His wife and child would visit him towards evening. They were very kind to us and were particularly fond of Laila. Laila became friendly with everyone in the sanatorium. She wished everyone *Namaste* and welcomed them in Russian. A large number of people used to join us as we went for walks in the evening with Laila. They played with her and talked to her.

I spent a month and a half in the sanatorium, after which Susheela and Laila had to spend a few days in the Kremlin hospital in Moscow for treatment.

It was at this time that I visited Poland and Bulgaria. I went first to Poland. Flying from Moscow in the morning, I reached Warsaw at 3pm. The First Secretary of the Foreign Office and other friends took me from the airport to a hotel reserved for Party guests.

If one visits Warsaw one cannot miss the vestiges of the horrors of war. Warsaw was subjected to a concerted fascist attack during the Second World War. Its recovery from the ravages has been quite remarkable. There is a must in the itinerary of all visitors to Poland. It is the large pillar erected in memory of Russian soldiers who fell in Poland's liberation struggle. I went to this monument the day after I reached Poland and placed flowers there.

At the centre of the city is a museum that contains historical records of the ills of fascism and the heroic struggle waged against it. Even a cursory visit takes two hours. The immense desire for peace in Poland is a direct result of the

immense suffering brought among its people by war.

The second day of my visit was the National Freedom Day. It was celebrated at a place 150 miles away from Warsaw. Immediately Comrade Gomulka and the other Ministers arrived, they were greeted by the plaudits of the crowd. A military parade followed. This lasted until 1pm A lunch party was the final item. Dressed like a man in the street, the smiling Gomulka welcomed me saying that they had the greatest regard for India. The interpreter whispered something in his ears at which he came forward and shook my hands saying *Oh.... Kerala!*

It was 4pm Lunch was over. Later I visited a cooperative farm, a radio factory and several villages. I also visited two or three Catholic churches. As always, Church authorities still want to obstruct Poland's march towards socialism. They do what they can towards this end.

The co-operative movement was strong in Poland too. Industrial progress on the other hand was safe in the hands of workers' councils.

The story of modern Poland cannot be told in a few words. It is the march of a whole people towards a new goal. The mistakes that they may make are pardonable as their final aim is man's great triumph.

On July 24, I reached Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, from Poland. The comrades waiting for me at the airport took me to the Balkan Hotel for some rest. Bulgaria with its salubrious climate could be called a health resort. There were numerous health resorts in the country. Foreigners were fond of bathing off the beach at Barna on the Black Sea coast. There

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were 20,000 visitors staying at Gold Coast, so called for the gold-coloured sand found on the sea-shore. I spent two days there. I could be active as long as the doctor permitted after breakfast.

There were more than 2,000 houses on the hill top where my hotel was situated. They were all self-contained. There were Communist leaders from a number of countries in my hotel.

Bulgaria is almost a synonym of Dimitrov. With pride I paid homage with flowers at the museum of Dimitrov. My joy knew no bounds when I remembered that I was doing this on behalf of the Central Committee of the Indian Communist Party.

I went one day to see the little village of Kibra. The first Communist group was started here in 1919. The Party was banned from 1923 to 1930, i.e. until the start of the Fascist revolution. It emerged from the ban under the title of Workers' Party. The Party worked against heavy odds even afterwards. The people finally won the long battle. A new mode of life was ushered in. This was based on co-operative societies.

Bulgaria is today self-sufficient in food and also exports it to other countries. How great their development has been can be seen from the fact that it exports food even to the Soviet Union. Of all the small democratic countries that I visited, Bulgaria had the strongest and the best co-operative farming system. But even here the early days were full of difficulties. Many did not have faith in such a movement. The co-operative movement began in 1948 with 260 hectares of land. By 1958, it had increased to 1,360 hectares. The

Kartha Pokunari farm located about 153 kilometres from Sofia stands as witness to the success of the movement. The prime reason for the success was the concept of furthering one's individual interests by those of the nation.

The Bulgarians well know that the progress of the nation depends on the ties of goodwill between the people and the government. They love those who have contributed to their growth. This was why the common people there were attached to the Soviet Union.

While at Plovidin, I could not decline an invitation from the Party Secretary who wanted me to join in a farewell for the first Brigade Camp. By 'Brigade' was meant a volunteer force that was willing to do anything for the nation and to undergo any sacrifice. Brigades comprised boys and girls studying in universities and high schools. Such training for about a month every year was a compulsory part of education.

Those at the camp did not know of my visit beforehand. When they learnt that an Indian had arrived, the Captain whistled for the Brigade groups to report. It was clear from their lively eyes and smiling faces that they were ready to do anything for the country.

They had unbounded love for the people of India. While walking inside the park one day, a young man came and embraced me when he found that I was an Indian. He shouted, *Long Live Indo-Bulgarian friendship*. He lifted me with joy and tossed me up in the air. How proud of being an Indian I was then!

At the Brigade camp, everything was spick and span. There was a time-table with hours fixed for study, relaxation,

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work and rest. They do a large variety of things during the month of training, which includes the laying of roads and improvement of farmland.

The whole village joined in the farewell meeting. There was singing and dancing. I talked to them for a little while, though I was not sure I was qualified to do so. These were the leaders of the socialist movement of tomorrow. Socialism was safe in their hands. Obstacles were powerless against them.

I was invited for a small folk dance after food. I came from the land of Kathakali and Bharatha Natyam, but I did not know how to dance. I was ashamed of myself. But as I felt it would be churlish to refuse the invitation, I also danced a few steps.

We thus returned to India after two months of rest and travel. The two-month rest greatly benefited us. It helped me to regain my health to some extent. I had not spent even a week with my family since my marriage. In these circumstances the two months of rest that I had with my family was a time of relaxation as well as happiness.

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As President of the All-India Kisan Sabha, I toured various states more than once at this time. The agitation against development tax in the Punjab broke out then. The peasant union in Punjab was a strong organisation. It had nearly 200,000 members in 1958.

Peasants used to be supplied with water from Bhakra-Nangal dam. They were already paying water tax and surcharge. But the Kairon government in the Punjab started insisting that they pay 123 crores of rupees over a period of 25 years as development tax to defray the cost of the Bhakra-Nangal project. The peasants decided to oppose this. Thus was born a state-wide agitation against development tax.

I went to the Punjab to take part in this agitation in which people were arrested and *lathi-charged* in their hundreds. The peasants of the Punjab continued the agitation with amazing calm and resolution. Clashes with the police were not initiated by the public. The government was thus foiled in its attempt to break up the peasants' agitation on the ground that it was violent. But still oppression went on.

We learnt of police firing at Ethiana in which two people

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died. I set out for that village immediately in the company of other comrades.

We reached there on the morning of the second day after the firing. We found people crowding below a banyan tree in that little village. Some started running, taking our vehicle for a police van. They returned later when they learnt that we were friends. They described what had happened, and showed us the spot where the firing had taken place. The police had stationed themselves in the centre and fired in all directions. We could see marks of gun shots on the walls and doors of houses. Something happened in the meantime. As we were walking around the village, an old woman who had her arms broken in the *lathi charge* came to know of our presence. She described what happened. She complained that she was beaten by the police while sitting inside her house. After five minutes, another woman came out from the crowd. She brought tea on a tray. She gave us cups of tea saying, *Since you have come to visit us in our village, you must have tea.* We were served tea by the woman with broken arms. What courtesy! We talked to the villagers for about an hour.

We then went on to the next village. A large number of policemen had descended on it. They were just then in the process of ransacking the houses of the *Satyagrahis* in an effort to realise the fine imposed on them. The people did not submit to this and were fighting back *en masse*. It was a struggle with the people on one side and the police on the other. The Punjabi peasant is brave. He is ready to face his enemy whoever he may be.

As we reached Ludhiana in the evening, we learnt that a

large number of policemen had gone to the village of Sherpur and that the people were not allowed to leave it. By this time Comrade Ajoy Ghosh had also arrived in the Punjab. The two of us went to that village. Nearly 500 policemen were on guard right around it. No one was allowed to enter or leave. The villagers were unable to go out even to buy provisions. When we arrived the police blocked our entry into the village. We were told by the police that the inhabitants of the village were making preparations to fight against them. *They are armed with guns and other weapons. They are therefore trying to oppose us. You should not go inside. If you do, your life will be in danger.* We insisted on going inside at least to talk to the villagers and study the situation there. It was night-time. We were informed that we would be arrested if we took one more step. We decided to go to Chandigarh and send telegrams to the Governor and Chief Minister and to make other arrangements and return the following day. The police remained there overnight. No one knew what was happening inside the village. The police again refused to let us in the next morning, so we left for Chandigarh. There we met Governor Gadgil. The Governor said that the situation would not continue like that and that he would see that the villagers were allowed out and those outside were allowed in.

We set out again in the evening. Renu Chakravarti and Punnoose had reached Puajab by this time. We went to the village together. Some of the police had been withdrawn. But some were still there. We entered the village. The police asked us to leave. We proceeded, paying no heed to the police. By this time about 300 policemen had arrived. An argument

broke out between us and the police. The police withdrew when they learnt that some of us were members of Parliament. The police inside the village who were plundering the houses also withdrew.

The villagers took us to their houses and showed us the looting that had taken place there. The police had carried away clothes and gold, silver and other valuables. The doors and windows had been broken open. We could see in some houses signs of the police having opened fire in order to intimidate the inmates. We toured the village for about two hours. When we took leave of them, the womenfolk started weeping. *If you go, the police will kill us. Do not go*, they said. They had been completely demoralised by police highhandedness. Renu and I decided to spend the night there. Our other companions returned to Chandigarh.

We sat near the banyan tree close to where the police had stood guard. The peasant women brought a cot for us. The villagers crowded around us and talked to us. I went all over the village with a stick in my hand. I talked to those staying indoors. On the whole, the villagers were in high spirits as a result of our presence, reassuring words and rounds of the village. They became bolder. We sat through the night like this. In the meantime, the Government withdrew the police. Only four or five were left on guard duty. The villagers gave us food. There was little left in the village, but they made chapathis and curry with what they had. We ate a little and took our leave. Old women as well as young men bade farewell to us in tears. *You lay awake the whole of last night in our village. It was for us. We will never forget it. You should come here again. You should*

enquire about us. The police will not leave us alone. These were their last words. I revisited the village two months later when the prisoners had all been released at the end of the agitation. A souvenir was presented to the Parliamentary Group and sheets to Renu and me. What kindness and what love! The toiling people will never forget their friends and those who help them in their privations and difficulties. There is no gainsaying this.

We left for Chandigarh at night. We toured two or three villages the next day. All the villages were surrounded by the police. About 400 or 500 policemen would go to each village. They would enter the village and carry away whatever they could lay hands on, on the pretext that they were collecting fines from *Satyagrahis* who had been fined. This was the position. Verbal clashes between me and the police took place in all the villages. Anyway, my presence gave the villagers some confidence. I returned to Chandigarh where I met MLA's of various parties and talked to them. While talking to them in the house of the Punjab Communist MP Dalta, a group of policemen entered the house. The senior officer among them showed me an order. It stated that I should leave Punjab within 12 hours and should not enter the State for a year. I signed the order. I said that I would intimate them before 4pm whether or not I would abide by the order. I immediately sent a long letter to the Governor and the IG of police. I said that I was going to violate the order as it was *ultra-vires* the Constitution. In an hour, CID men began clustering and cycling around the house, reminding me of bees hovering around budding flowers. The householders too were a little

rattled. Comrade Dalta was in jail. His wife and child and clerk were there. Dalta's wife understood the situation only later. She provided me with a nice meal to eat at night. She was happy that I was going to jail with Dalta. CID men annoyed me the whole night. I thought I would be arrested at any moment. I could not sleep. I learned that there had been firing the previous night at Naroor village and that five people including two women had died. This worried me a great deal. Anyway, I was sure that the downfall of the corrupt Kairon Government was near at hand.

I spent the whole night without sleep. At 8am the police came and said that I was under arrest. I was put in a van with a large police escort. We reached Delhi around noon. It was announced that I was free. As soon as I reached Delhi, I arranged with Comrade V.P Nair to file a writ petition in the High Court against this deportation. When after two days Nair went to the High Court to file the petition, the deportation order was withdrawn. The brave peasants of the Punjab conducted a vigorous agitation. The Kisan Sabha can be proud of the struggle. They suffered a lot, but were able to make the Government withdraw the order stipulating a tax of 123 crores of rupees. The Government cut out 100 crores from it and ordered that 23 crores be paid. They were thus able to browbeat the Kairon Government. As President of the Kisan Sabha, I am proud that I could take part in their struggle.

Chapter 25

The twenty-eight month Communist Government in Kerala marks a decisive period in the history of the Communist Party. A genuine Marxist Party could learn from that experience a number of lessons regarding the character of state power and consequently chalk out its future strategy.

The victory of the Communist Party in the 1957 elections reflected the disgust of the people of Kerala, especially the toiling masses, with the factionalism and corruption in the Congress Party. The Communist Party stood out as the only alternative with a coherent programme, a record of hard work and struggles for the people. Kerala politics in the years before 1957 had been reduced to a farce by Congressmen with their constant bickerings, horse-trading and corruption. In the period 1947-57, there were ten ministries made and unmade in Kerala by the politics of discredited Congressmen and ex-Congressmen. It was with this background of failure of *bourgeois* parliamentarism that a Communist Party was elected to office, through the ballot box, for the first time in the history of the world. However, as our experience confirmed, *State Power* did not reside at the state level, but with

the Central Government.

From the day the ministry assumed office, the reactionaries and conservatives both inside and outside the Congress, got busy hatching plans to topple the Government. The Communist Party with 60 members and 5 independents supported by them in the Assembly controlled 65 of the 126 seats. This was the first ministry in Kerala with a well-knit though small majority, that did not fall prey to factionalism. Attempts to bribe and cajole individual Communist MLA's by the reactionaries failed. One legislator was offered Rs. 2 lakhs to defect, but this also did not succeed in breaking the unity of the Communist group. This is remarkable considering the rapid turnover of ministries and loyalties in Kerala prior to 1957. For the first time Kerala had a stable ministry with a coherent ideology.

The Communist Party had also drawn up a comprehensive scheme for a gradual but radical restructuring of the economic and social set-up in the State with a view to establishing some of the pre-conditions for socialism. These were soon put into action. Development activities were carried on smoothly and without a hitch, for the first time. During the First Five Year Plan, the percentage of fulfilment of targets during the whole period was 83.4 per cent, while in the first year of the Second Plan it was 64.2 per cent. In 1957-58, the year the Communists took office, despite the need to familiarise themselves with the governmental process, the target fulfilment was 84.5 per cent and in the next year, 1958-59, approximately 100 per cent.

The State Government also drew up definite plans for

industrialisation of the State even though it was handicapped by the fact that the Central Government had already finalised them before the Communist Government assumed office.

Perhaps the most important step taken by the Ministry was the democratisation of the State Administration. Efforts were made to concretely associate the people with the planning and developmental activities. The people's food committees and fair price shops were steps in this direction. Similar committees were set up in the educational and health spheres. It also ensured that the opposition parties were also represented on the basis of electoral support. It was with this decentralisation in view that the Panchayat Bill and another Bill, vesting local powers at the district level to an elected district council, were introduced. This no doubt threatened many vested interests at the village level.

The most significant step which angered the reactionaries was the police policy of the Government. It was not an easy task to change the attitudes of the police forces inherited from the colonial period. But the Government began the re-education of police cadres in their attitude to the people. This was not fully implemented because of the difficulties. However, the police policy ensured that the police would never be sent to beat up the workers to protect the management, arrest the peasants to safeguard the landlords' property and put a stop to the indiscriminate use of police to terrorise mass democratic movements. It was this policy which ran foul of the "democratic" opponents of the Government!

In the crucial field of agrarian relations, the Ministry introduced the Agrarian Relations Bill which ensured the

rights of various classes of tenants, including share-croppers, and plugged many loopholes which the landlords might utilise. We must note how in the previous years in Kerala, governments were successively toppled especially when they took even a moderate step to legislate on land reforms. The Panampilly cabinet was toppled a week after the Select Committee on the Travancore-Verumpattadar Bill submitted its final report. That was in 1956. It was then that Congress MLA's representing the Nair Service Society, who had functioned as props for the Panampilly ministry as well as K.V Koran, T.M Varghese and others took leave of the ruling party. Similarly Kumbalathu Sanku Pillai arrived in Trivandrum with the ashes of *Desabhimani* (our Party paper) and started a campaign against the Pattom Ministry in Travancore when it invited Professor Mathan Tharakan and got a report prepared by him on the basic principles of the land reform bill. *Te Congresspolicy is bound to impose a ceiling on the land held by those who have 4,000 to 5,000 acres of land. This policy will be implemented*, declared the Congress Chief Minister of Travancore-Cochin, Paravar T. K. Narayana Pillai. His ministry did not last even a fortnight after this.

The record here is one in which no ministry has been allowed to proceed in the field of land reforms, however nominal the steps taken. It is therefore not surprising that efforts to topple the Communist ministry began as soon as an ordinance against eviction was brought forward on the sixth day after the swearing-in of the ministry. Further, the Communists were able to introduce and enact the land reform bill ignoring the attempts made by the rightist opposition to win

over a few of the Communist MLA's. Infuriated by this threat, the feudal landlord classes forged so-called leftist unity and came out with determination to topple the ministry at any cost. What happened on 31 July 1959, was the dramatic finale to this campaign.

Being a Communist Government, the ministry took special care to protect the legitimate rights of the working class. The pay-scales of the State Transport employees were raised by 10 to 50 per cent. In May 1957, the 4,000 employees of the postal establishment were given a pay rise. Kerala was the first state to ask newspaper owners to implement the working journalists award, since the stay order given by the Supreme Court affected only those who had appealed. As regards privately owned industries, the Government had either fixed minimum wages or taken steps to implement the minimum wages already announced in coir, *beedi*, cashew, handloom, water transport and many such industries.

It was the effect of the above policies which incurred the wrath of the rightist anti-communist forces in the state. All the steps taken by the Government constituted a threat to vested interests. The police policy of the Government prevented the factory owners and landlords from using the police to terrorise the workers and peasants at will. The ordinance against eviction infuriated the *Jenmis*. The Education Bill which sought to provide protection for teachers oppressed by private managers and which attempted certain fundamental reforms in the educational field hit directly at the vested communal interests who had made education into a business enterprise. Catholics, Nayars and Muslims—the communal

forces among these communities rallied together and provided a strange spectacle of unity. This so-called “liberation struggle”, as it was later self-styled, was headed by the conservative communal leader of the Nair Service Society, Mannath Padmanabhan. He was the *Commander in Chief* and his lieutenants comprised a motley crowd, chief among whom were padres and bishops of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church was gravely disturbed about the educational reforms as these would deprive them of their vast and remunerative empire of schools. So the agitation was originally initiated by the most reactionary and communal elements, but it was soon taken up, carried forward and perfected by the Congress, PSP and RSP. In varying degrees, the padres, the Nayar *Jenmis*, the Muslim landlords, the Congress and PSP politicians were against the reforms initiated in the field of education, land relations etc., and hence the unholy alliance was founded. Here they got powerful backing from the Congress Party, which was ruling at the Centre and in 13 other states and which constituted the main opposition party in Kerala.

The mass media, mostly controlled by the *bourgeois* and communal interests, began a hate campaign of slander and provocation. *Deepika*, the organ of the Catholic Church, repeatedly called for the breaking of laws, and for the overthrow of the Government by force. A conference of Catholic Bishops met in Bangalore in December 1958 and considered *material and spiritual ways* to overthrow the Communist Government. *Christophers*, volunteer armies and *shanti senas* were formed. This was followed by attacks on police stations at Ankamali, and Kochuveli. These inobs were led by fanatic Christophers

who were told that their religion was in danger.

On May 1, 1959, the communal leaders met at Changanacherry and passed resolutions supporting the school closure movement. Congressmen took a prominent part in the proceedings, including K. Velayuthan Nair who moved the main resolution. A *Vimochana Samara Samithi* was formed with Mannath Padmanabhan at its head. *Deepika* announced *Today's "liberation struggle" will liberate India, and most probably the whole of Asia from Communism.*

The Congress leaders took an active role in instigating violence. Schools and buses were set on fire, government servants and Communist Ministers physically assaulted—this was the programme of the “liberation struggle”. The struggle was launched in the hope that in the name of law and order the Centre would intervene. The attacks on schools and government property instead of being condemned by the Congress, won their approval. In fact the Congress leader Panampilly Govinda Menon went to the extent of warning the Government officers: *The IAS and IPS personnel should remember one thing: if you do rotten things on the order of Communists you will have to answer for it. I am giving you this warning in my own name and also in the name of the Joint Action Council.* Such were the threats of the Congress which continuously accused the Communists of tampering with the administrative machinery.

The Congress trio of Indira Gandhi, Shriman Narayan and U.N Dhebar were not far behind in responding to this rigged-up agitation. In fact Shriman Narayan raised the cry of “insecurity” on the third day after the ministry took charge.

As riggedup agitations like the *Sitaram struggle*, *Kattampalli struggle* and the *boat fare agitation* took place one after another, the Central Congress leadership made the necessary exclamations of alarm at the Communist attempt to unleash “class war”. The Congress leadership under Nehru and Indira Gandhi finally gave their blessings to Central intervention and tore off the mask of democracy which they had so long worn. The role of the “left parties” was equally reprehensible. The PSP, under its leader Pattom Thanu Pillai, and the RSP actively ganged up with the reactionary forces in the “liberation struggle” to instigate violence.

The toiling people of Kerala were ready to defend their Government and they resolutely fought back the rightist onslaught in schools, villages, factories and towns. This provided further false propaganda for the communal-Congress clique that the Communists were bent upon fomenting class hatred. I spent most of the time building up the morale of the workers and peasants to face the attacks and in organising the Kisan Sabha to consolidate the gains achieved under the Ministry. I was in the Soviet Union for three months during this period, but I returned because of the situation in Kerala.

On 31 July 1959, by a Presidential order the Communist Ministry in Kerala was dismissed. The *bourgeois*-landlord Congress Party moved decisively to protect its interests. The background was set by the 58 days of violent frenzy unleashed by the Congress-led communal forces. The Marxist principle that the *bourgeoisie* will resort to any means to prevent transfer of power to another class was confirmed by this experience. The *bourgeoisie* swears by democracy only as long as

the balance of power remains in their hands. When it begins to slip away, they will resort to anti-democratic and fascist methods to retain it. The very, so-called, upholders of “parliamentary democracy” in India were instrumental in destroying the myth of their “free system”. Democrats throughout India expressed their protest. Three lakhs of people demonstrated in Calcutta on Kerala Day on 3 August 1959. Protests and demonstrations were held throughout the length and breadth of India.

Although brief, these 28 months were a period of honour for our Party. The enactments that came one by one were all designed to improve the material standards of the toiling masses, to provide some relief to the suffering people and in the process enhance their political consciousness. This does not mean that the Government was free of failures and shortcomings. It certainly suffered the failures natural in a situation where revolutionary changes were being initiated within the *bourgeois* frame-work and by making use of the *bourgeois* machinery. We had not forgotten Lenin’s *State and Revolution*, but effective power in India definitely did not reside at the state level but at the Centre. Therefore coming to office at the state level meant only a further step in advancing the revolutionary struggle. I don’t think this was very clear in the minds of many of our people and our supporters. There were failings too that were caused by lack of that attention to detail which is so necessary when a revolutionary party undertakes parliamentary work. But there was in every one of its undertakings a progressive feature that had no parallel in the 17 years of parliamentary history in India. These

steps were such as to enthuse and inspire the toiling masses throughout India. The Indian *bourgeoisie* realised the impact of these steps and their long-term implications.

Democratic sentiment throughout the country was against the Centre's dictatorial step, but they were unable to protect the Government and warn the Indian working classes and other toiling masses that the *bourgeoisie* would not sleep over the loss of power and that toppling a government of the working class was a matter of survival for them from their viewpoint. Looking back, one sees that the Communist Ministry did definitely help in advancing the political consciousness of our people and the *bourgeois*-landlord regime did succeed in toppling it because at that historical juncture we were not strong enough and well enough organised throughout the country to prevent such an anti-democratic measure.

I would like to conclude my account of this period with a personal incident. The Punnapra-Vayalar Day was celebrated in October 1958 at Alleppey. I was a speaker at that meeting. Only a week prior to this there had been a police firing at Munnar. I dealt with this firing in my speech and condemned it in no uncertain terms. On the basis of my speech, the notorious Mariarpootham, DSP filed a suit against me alleging defamation. Judgement was given in this case in October 1959. The Alleppey Magistrate sentenced me to a fine of Rs. 500 or six months' rigorous imprisonment in the event of default. Although I refused to pay the fine, the lawyer paid it. I thus did not have to undergo imprisonment. I had thought ironically to myself at that time: *Am I to suffer imprisonment*

IN THE CAUSE OF THE PEOPLE

even under a Communist Ministry?

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The ten days that I spent at Amaravathi constitute an unforgettable period of my life. Amaravathi became famous throughout India. The problems behind *Amaravathi* are equally important. There is no doubt that the Amaravathi agitation has succeeded to an extent in bringing the political significance of these problems before the Government and the people, in organising discussions on the pros and cons of the issue and in making the Government adopt relief measures for the refugees of Amaravathi.

It was in 1948 after the Congress came into power that peasants started migrating to the high ranges in eastern Travancore. Not long after the Congress came into power, it allotted five acres of arable land to each family in order to increase food production. Peasants settled down on these allotted lands and started growing crops. With the allotment of forest lands in this manner for cultivation, rich people and others from villages started unauthorised encroachment. In a short time, farmers and peasants had virtually reached the high ranges. None of the Governments that came into power in Travancore-Cochin were able to prevent this exodus.

When the Communist ministry came into power in 1957, large portion of the forest lands of the high ranges was already under occupation either through allotment or through unauthorised intrusion. The Communist government announced that those who had occupied the lands prior to April 27, 1957 would not be evicted but would be given some land in perpetuity if they did not already own land at home and that no fresh encroachment would be allowed. But things did not work out in accordance with this declaration. As part of their efforts to foil the Communist government, the Opposition provided leadership for organised encroachment of forest lands. Wealthy families in Meenachil, Thodupuzha, Kanjirappalli, Changanacherry and other places in Kottayam district took part directly in these forest encroachments and even set up big syndicates for the purpose. They had many agents who toured the interior and enthused poor peasants by telling them that very fertile land was available at a low price in the forest area. The poor peasant with his unquenchable thirst for land trustingly sold all his belongings and went to the forest and bought land from those who were very rich and prominent, with no idea that they were the hapless victims of fraud. A large number of the peasants of Udumpanchola taluk including the refugees of Amaravathi acquired land in this manner. The rich landlords and estate owners of Kottayam district have sent Harijans in this manner to the forests. They had for long been tenants of their land. In addition to all this, many peasants had occupied forest land during the *liberation struggle* at the behest of leaders. Some of them had purchased the land as mentioned above. With the success of

the *liberation struggle* and the coming into power of the United Front government, the general impression was that none of them would be evicted. The flow of people to these places intensified because of this and the price of land boomed.

This forest land which until recently had been the playground of wild elephants and other animals thus became a verdant habitation with crops of paddy, tapioca, pepper, banana trees and others. In addition, the farmers planted cash crops like coconut palms and areca nut trees. The whole place became a verdant monument to the sweat and expertise of the peasants. Behind the conversion of these hills and valleys into fertile plantations was a thrilling story of the struggle of these peasants with nature. It is impossible to visit that place without feeling proud of the boundless energy and resourcefulness of our peasants.

Believing the leaders who assured them that there would be no eviction of any kind, the peasants invested their all in growing crops there. Their attention and energies were concentrated on their plantations. It was against this background that eviction started at Ayyappankoil on May 2. The peasants were shocked to see, on the morning of the 2nd, a very large force of armed policemen who had arrived to evict them. Just for this eviction, a police station and a magistrate's court had been opened. A special RDO was deputed to supervise these evictions. The peasants of Ayyappankoil must have felt as though the whole place was submerged under a cordon formed by officials.

The police started tearing down the huts on May 2. Finding that mere pulling down of the huts was useless the po-

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lice started burning them from the next day. They wanted to reduce an average of 100 houses to ashes daily. Armed police everywhere. An atmosphere of strife permeated the area. There was nothing but fire and smoke during the day. Children cried aloud. Women were in tears. Many fainted. Menfolk trembled in fear. Paddy fields stretched out as far as the eye could see. Tapioca plantations yielding at least two *tulams* (approx. 35 lbs) of tapioca per root filled the whole place. There were thousands of banana plants, some already bearing fruit and others about to fructify. While burning the houses, the police were also destroying these crops. Anyone with the slightest trace of humanity in his make-up can imagine the feelings of these peasants as they watched the destruction of the fruit of their sweat and toil and the only support of their existence. None of them felt that they had done anything wrong.

About 1700 families consisting of 10,000 people in 8,000 acres of land were thus evicted in Ayyappankoil. They were all forcibly removed from there to Amaravathi near Kumili about 40 miles away and abandoned in the forest there. There was incessant rain during these days. Dampness and bleakness pervaded everywhere. Those evicted were kept under police supervision. They were presented before the RDO. It was he who selected those who were entitled to alternate land. That official refused to pass up those with shirts on, those without wife or children, those who had watches and those who had served in the army. In some cases, two or three families got only one chit. That RDO was bereft of all human feelings. Mere mention of his name is sufficient to infuriate those

peasant families. This official was in charge of the eviction at Ayyappankoil also. Had a tactful official been sent there, there would not have been so much trouble there.

Those who got chits were taken to Amaravathi in State transport buses. They were forced to leave behind poultry, goats, dogs, and other animals and their cots, bedding and other effects. An organisation named Kerala Karshaka Union functioned in Udumpanchola *taluk* under the leadership of the Kottayam district Congress committee. Nearly all the peasants of that region were organised under this Union. The leaders of this organisation had assured the people that not a single peasant would be evicted. When word came of the impending eviction proceedings, these leaders issued a call for struggle and collected a huge amount from the peasants in the name of an Agitation Fund. But those leaders were not to be seen anywhere afterwards. Deceived alike by the liberation leaders who brought them to the forest and also by the Union leaders who gave guarantees against eviction, these unfortunate peasants became victims of the merciless eviction proceedings of the Government. Dumped into the hell-hole of Amaravathi, and without any plans for their future life, they were in a state of utter despair.

Nearly 10,000 human beings were thrown into Amaravathi amidst heavy downpour and with absolutely no arrangements for their rehabilitation. The Government had not constructed even a shed to accommodate them. These families spent a few days in the rain and cold. There were among them women who had just given birth, little children, expectant women, old men and sick people. They had no

shelter, no food or even drinking water.

Out of sympathy for the miseries of these refugees, some poor peasants and workers in the neighbourhood of Amaravathi gave some of them temporary shelter in their huts. After a week, the Government made four stable-like sheds for them with bamboo poles and straw. A shed of this kind normally accommodates five or six families. But 60 and 70 families were obliged to stay in each one of them. No matter how many members a family had, each family was given one measure of rice a week by the Government. The Government also announced that each family would be given one acre of land and 10 rupees to construct a hut. But there were 500 or 600 acres of arable land in Amaravathi. The rest was rocky terrain on which not even grass will grow. The RDO wanted to force even such land on the peasants. Those who had four or five acres of fertile land in Ayyappankoil got in return a single acre here. And even that was dry land. This is what the Government did to rehabilitate those evicted. The peasants were naturally unwilling to receive these small favours from the Government. Although abandoned by their leaders, the brave peasants were not cowed down by intimidation. Stark disappointment made them ready to face any eventuality.

I was not in Kerala at the time of the Ayyappankoil eviction. The Parliament session then going on lasted until May 9. I toured Himachal Pradesh for a week after that in connection with Kisan Sabha work. I then toured in Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Mysore.

It was then that I read Malayalam newspapers. I learned of the eviction from some statements of leaders of the Com-

munist Party and the Kerala Karshaka Union who visited Udumpanchola and Amaravathi and from some articles in *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhoomi*. Reading these, I wondered whether such inhuman actions were even possible. Anyway I decided to go to Kerala immediately to visit Amaravathi. I cancelled my other engagements and set out for Kerala. I reached Kottayam on May 30. On June 1, K.T Jacob and I left for Amaravathi. The peasants had arranged for a public meeting there on that day. I found many men, women and children going to the meeting in a procession. Before the meeting began, they invited me to see their shed. Mud filled the shed and its premises. It was difficult even to enter. There was no room inside even to turn on one's heels. The utensils and other articles brought by them were there. There was a strong breeze and unbearable chill. Children were lying on torn mats on the damp floor. With tears in their eyes, men, women, old and young, related their tales of woe. That shed was a terrible sight. No one with a heart could leave it unmoved. Outside the shed, some families were living along with cattle in the stables of some houses. What a terrible plight! I felt that this was a challenge to humanity. Delirious with power, the Government and ministers did not care for those poor people. I went from the shed to the meeting place. There were many policemen there. Not to help the refugees, but only to create provocation. I went after the meeting to Udumpanchola. The peasants there showed me the sites where eviction had been effected. The picture of the eviction that I have sketched above was gleaned from these peasants and from the refugees of Amaravathi. I found hundreds of huts had been destroyed.

Some of them were durable huts built with timber and stones. To pull them down was not an easy task. Crops like banana and tapioca and vegetables had been destroyed on a large scale. We visited as many places as possible. While returning from there, I remembered the poor people living in the sheds of Amaravathi with nothing to eat and their children crying of hunger. I also saw at Ayyappankoil, tapioca and vegetables and bananas destroyed. Who was responsible for this cruelty? Can one believe that this was done at the behest of ministers who proclaim from the housetops that they have come to power in order to feed the hungry and to provide work for the unemployed? I was greatly tormented by the funereal picture of Ayyappankoil where houses had been reduced to ashes and the miseries of the human beings of Amaravathi.

The Udumpanchola Karshaka Samithi was meeting at 9pm I attended this meeting. Many spoke there in great anger and with uncontrollable resentment. They said in one voice, *We will not rest unt this is answered.* Who were these peasant protectors? Most of them were leaders of the “liberation struggle” of Udumpanchola. Some of them had courted imprisonment four or five times in the “liberation struggle”. Some of them were Congress activists and members of responsible Congress Committees. Most of them were active workers of the Karshaka Union of Shri Lukose. *They stole our money by telling us that we would not be evicted from here even if a barren cow gave birth. When we were finally evicted and thrown into the streets, these leaders vanished,* some of the leaders of the Karshaka Union told me with great heat. These peasants more or less knew by this time how to distinguish their friends from

their foes. They had forgotten their class ties because of blind Communist phobia. This is what happens when peasants are organised on the basis of religion and caste.

We left for Kottayam that night. There was a public meeting at Kottayam on the 2nd. I went through back numbers of newspapers to find out what the leaders and MLA's of Kottayam had said about Amaravathi. I knew one thing. People of all political persuasions and citizens not tied to any party had all strongly criticised the eviction at Udumpanchola and the situation in Amaravathi. MLA's and MP's who visited the place had informed the Government that the steps it had taken to rehabilitate the peasants of Amaravathi were entirely unsatisfactory. But still the Government did not do the right thing at the right time.

I saw in this not only a Kerala problem but an All-India problem. Evictions for "development projects" had been carried out in many places. And they will continue in the future too. But is it to be done with *lathis* and guns? Is it not necessary to include the expense on rehabilitation of the evicted in the cost of the project itself? When 50 crores of rupees are invested on a project, why not spend 50 lakhs of rupees to rehabilitate those who are displaced by that project? If this is not done, it only means the destruction of thousands of human beings in the name of national reconstruction. These projects are meant to help people and not to harass them. If the very existence of thousands of families is threatened because of the project, then what is that project for? The problems of Kerala are of a peculiar kind. The colossal and swelling population, large-scale unemployment, inadequacy of land, the

great yearning for land among peasants, the paucity of industries, the ruin of industries like coir and cashew—these particular problems of Kerala constitute a national problem in their vastness. Impelled by such thoughts, I decided to resort to some agitational method in order to bring the Amaravathi problem to the attention of the Central and state governments on an immediate basis. I declared at the public meeting that evening that I would go on a fast on June 6 at Amaravathi. I knew that I was taking up a huge responsibility. But I opted for this hazardous course because I was convinced that no sacrifice would be too great if it contributed to a solution of the human problem that existed in Amaravathi.

On June 6, I set out for Kumili at 9 o'clock in the morning from Kottayam along with Comrade EMS. It was a day of torrential rain. We found a large crowd there which included women, children and elderly persons shouting slogans while shivering in the rain. One of them shouted aloud, *We have been standing in the rain from 10 o'clock. We are ready to brave the rain for any length of time.* What zeal! The meeting began under the presidency of Karshaka Samithi president Sri Joseph. Comrade EMS and I spoke. It was still pouring at the end of the meeting. We set out for Amaravathi in a procession in the downpour. A small shed of bamboo poles and straw had been built close to the shed of the refugees at Amaravathi. I entered the shed and began the fast after sipping a glass of orange juice. Pressmen and others were present. The *satyagraha* thus began at 3pm on June 6.

Days passed. I had undertaken fasts frequently in jail and sometimes outside for as long as 5, 8, 15 and 48 days.

But never before had I fasted under such adverse circumstances. Incessant rain. Strong chilly winds. A small room amidst water and mud. Unbearable stench. No drinking water. And many other similar problems. It was very hard to continue the *Satyagraha*. Women going out in the morning to fetch water would have a look at me before starting. They paid another visit while returning with water. Women going to church on Sunday would visit me with prayer books. Peasants would walk up the road in front of the shed every morning shouting slogans. They used to visit me before the start of the *jatha*. Their loving glances encouraged me. I was touched by their affectionate slogans. Mingled feelings passed through my mind. There were Christians, Pulayas, Nairs, Ezhavas and Muslims among them. There were Congress, League and PSP supporters and one or two Communists too. There were also people belonging to other political parties. There were anti-Communists, NSS men and members of the Catholic Congress. But they were all united today. There were among them anti-Communists who believed that Communists should be stoned, as well as those who felt that they should not co-operate with Communists under any circumstance. There were also individuals who acted in the belief that the Nair should make capital out of the misfortunes of the Christian and vice versa. All such caste, religious, and political differences vanished in the face of a common cause and threat. The sheds of Amaravathi had banished all thought of traditional, political affiliation and sectarianism. The Congressman, the Communist and the anti-Communist lay side by side in that shed on a torn mat. The Christian, the Nair

and the Ezhava cooked and ate in common. They did not see me as a mere Communist. They did not care for my party or caste or religion. They regarded me as the head or nephew or brother of a family that sympathised with them in their miseries and difficulties and courted sacrifice in order to win them redress.

Crowds of people started visiting the *Satyagraha* camp. There was an endless flow of visitors on Sunday from 6am to 10pm. There were many kinds of people among the visitors. Those travelling by bus, in cars, and lorries would halt there and have a look and proceed. A collection box was placed at the *Satyagraha* camp. Contributions from 10 paise to 10 rupees were made there. All those who visited the Amaravathi sheds spoke with indignation and sorrow about the pitiable condition there. Whatever their politics or religion, they returned from there convinced that Amaravathi was hell. After eight days, the *Satyagraha* became an All-India issue. Leading newspapers started writing editorials. The issue was discussed in the Kerala Assembly where the Opposition staged a walk-out in protest against the Government's high-handed attitude. There was a steady flow of telegrams and letters to Prime Minister Nehru and the Kerala Chief Minister asking for an immediate solution to the Amaravathi problem. The anti-Communist papers of Kerala wrote that Communists were doing all this for political propaganda. But even they criticised the Ministers for not having visited Amaravathi and strongly pleaded for an early solution to the problem.

At this critical juncture, the only public figure who was a non-Communist, who helped the Amaravathi peasants was

Father Vadakkan of Vimochana Samaram fame. This leading anti-Communist who mobilised the Christians for a *holy war* against the Comrade EMS Ministry, now found the Church dignitaries and the big Christian landlords and Congressmen totally unsympathetic to the sufferings of the poor Christian peasantry and he was on the spot with blankets and other such items, to help them. He also supported my fast. The Amara-vathi struggle marked the gradual shift of Father Vadakkan's stand towards the Communists, and in later years he clashed with the Church hierarchy and his party, the Karshaka Thozhili Party, became an ally of the democratic movement.

Angry scenes were enacted once again in the Assembly on June 14. I was arrested on that day. Two van loads of policemen came at 3am under the leadership of the Kottayam DSP, to arrest me. It seems the Police Minister's instruction was that I should be snatched away at dead of night when everyone was asleep. Who would expect to be arrested while sleeping at night?

The DSP wanted to remove me on the pretext that my life was in danger. I informed him that it was an unnecessary step. Within minutes the news of the arrival of the police to arrest me reached all the sheds. Women, children and the aged crowded around my shed shouting slogans. They seemed to have felt that everything would be lost with my arrest. I found them determined not to allow me to be removed from there. The DSP Mr. Manjooran, knew only too well the feelings of the people of Amaravathi. To prevent the situation getting worse, the DSP requested me, through my secretary Kunjanandan, to get inside the van. I replied that if things

were not to get worse, the police should be withdrawn to Kumili, at least at this untimely hour. We warned the police officials that any wrong step and any provocative action by the police would lead to dangerous consequences. I was arrested around 10am under Section 309 CrPC on a charge of attempted suicide. I told the refugees gathered there that I was under arrest and they should keep calm. I told them that my arrest signified the Government's failure. They were only transferring this agitation from Amaravathi to Kottayam. Already on the 13th the Karshaka Sangham had announced that they would picket the Kottayam Collectorate from June 16. It was raining heavily when the ambulance carrying me started from Kumili. We found groups of people shouting slogans at Vandiperiyar, Kudikkanam, Mundakkayam and Ponkunnam on the way. The atmosphere echoed with these demonstrations against injustice.

I was taken to the Kottayam hospital in the forenoon of June 14. It was the ninth day of the fast. The hospital compound was filled with people. Police were on guard at the gate. Two policemen armed with guns fitted with bayonets were guarding the entrance to the ward. My mind and body were burning as a result of the arrival of the police, the arrest, the long ambulance journey and finally the remand. Doctor Pai sat near me and tried to cheer me up. He was very concerned about increased acetone activity in my urine and the low blood pressure. At 9am on June 16, the eleventh day of my fast, I became unconscious. Doctor Pai quickly gave me some injections and I regained consciousness. By the tenth day of the fast, there was very wide public support to the Amaravathi

problem. It re-echoed not only in Kottayam and Kerala but also in the whole of India.

The prime purpose of my fast was to bring the Amaravathi problem before public attention. Everyone was of the view that that aim had been fulfilled. If that were the only aim, I could have ended the fast then and there. But the minimal demands of the peasants of Amaravathi had at least to be conceded. It was not possible for me to terminate the fast otherwise. With the development of the fast into a mighty mass movement, anti-Communist papers of Kerala and the rest of India started writing editorials. These newspapers censured the government's wrong approach to the Amaravathi problem and requested me to terminate the fast now that the attention of the Government and the people had been attracted to the issue. After June 14 the agitation surged forward on the basis that the Government should take immediate steps for the termination of the fast.

The first to ask me to break the fast was Sarvodaya leader Sri Kelappan. His telegram arrived on the 8th day of fast. He said in the telegram: *I shall try to prevail upon the Governinent to give just relief to the peasants evicted at Amaravathi. Please terminate your fast for the time being. If the Government does not budge, I shall fast along with you at Amaravathi.*

Kelappaji's telegram reminded me of the past. It was a sincere message. But I was not able in the prevailing circumstances to pay full heed to it. There was no question of my ending the fast unless the Government did something for the Amaravathi peasants. I sent a telegram in reply to Kelappaji. I requested him to proceed immediately to Amaravathi if his

health permitted so that he could study the situation himself and hold discussions with me. Kelappaji's reply arrived on the day I was arrested and taken to Kottayam. It was a touching letter. It dealt with the sacrifices that the two of us had made jointly in the past. He gave his word that if necessary we should undertake a joint fast at Amaravathi and sacrifice ourselves. In that letter also he asked me to suspend my fast.

Even Congress MLA's and some of the Ministers felt that some compromise should be arrived at and the fast ended. Home Minister P.T Chacko took the greatest initiative in this. On June 15 he came to Kottayam from Trivandrum. He set out on receipt of reports that I was in a critical state. Sri Chacko visited me in Kottayam hospital. I talked to him with difficulty. However, our talk was long and very cordial. I felt that Sri Chacko was helpless in regard to Amaravathi. Along with Congress leader P.C Cherian, Sri Chacko, who was then Opposition leader, had played a leading role in inciting the people to encroach on lands in Udumpanchola. The encroachments were carried out with the full support of the Opposition parties of the time. They had then been evicted by the very people who prompted them to enter the lands. The eviction orders were signed by the very people who had led the encroachments in the past. How then could Sri Chacko face the Amaravathi peasants? It is not difficult to sense his dilemma.

Anyway, I felt very glad that Sri Chacko visited me. He wanted me to terminate my fast. For this, the Government must concede the just demands that I had put forward. He had reservations only on the question of increasing the land

allotment. I asked him how those people who had no other employment could live in that forest area without at least three acres of land. Sri Chacko said he would discuss all these matters with Comrade EMS and leaders of the Karshaka Sangam. Comrade EMS met Sri Chacko the same evening at the Kottayam Government House. Well-intentioned efforts for a solution of the Amaravathi problem started. In addition to Comrade EMS and other leaders of the Kerala Karshaka Sangham, Kelappaji and my Parliament colleague Sri Kottukapally participated in the talks. The leading newspaper editors of Kottayam and other public servants worked tirelessly along with them to bring about a solution.

As the compromise efforts were going on in the district hospital, Communist Party office and Government House, a mighty mass agitation was going on throughout Kerala. Picketing of collectorates, *jathas* to Trivandrum along the coast, through the mid region and the hilly areas, protest demonstrations and torch-light processions throughout the length and breadth of Kerala and thousands of telegrams and letters to the Prime Minister and the Kerala Chief Minister—these were some of the methods of agitation that the people adopted. Unlike the *liberation struggle*, there was no violence or anti-constitutional move of any kind in this agitation. Nearly 50 women picketed the Kottayam collectorate. Most of them were refugees from Amaravathi. The reports that I received hourly spoke of the surging mass movement. I felt that the very air of Kottayam town had changed.

Compromise talks went on for several hours on the 15th and 16th. But still no solution was forthcoming. On the

morning of the 17th an understanding was finally arrived at. Accordingly, Home Minister Chacko agreed to do a few things for the Amaravathi peasants. The Minister conceded most of the demands of the Amaravathi peasants including the grant of 3 acres of land for each family. On the basis of this, the Kerala Karshaka Sangham, the Udumpanchola Karshaka Protection Society and the Amaravathi Refugees Committee and friends requested me to break the fast. Sipping a glass of orange juice given by the Refugees Committee President Sri Joseph, I broke the fast at 1pm on the 17th, in the presence of Sri P.T Chacko, Sri K. Kelappan, KPCC President Sri C.K Govindan Nair, Comrade EMS, Comrade C.H Kanaran and countless other friends. The collectorate picketing and other direct actions started by the Kerala Karshaka Sangham were also withdrawn. The Minister assured me in a letter that the Government would do all that they had promised under this compromise agreement.

Ministers who had strongly propagated both in the assembly and outside that they had done for the Amaravathi peasants whatever was needed and that they did not deserve anything more, had to change their attitude and grant them new concessions. This was an achievement of the Amaravathi agitation. I do not think that this achievement is due solely to my fast. Behind this achievement can be clearly seen the organised efforts of Kerala's peasants, lovers of humanity and all lovers of democracy. It is only true that many friends of all parties including the Congress worked for it. Newspapers in India and outside also played a prominent role in it. My fast was useful in alerting the world to the pitiable condition of the

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unknown, living in hellish agony in the forests of Amaravathi, and in bringing public pressure to bear on the Government and compelling it into doing justice by them. I consider this my only service in the matter.

CHAPTER 26

Chapter 27

The peasants of Kerala lived in frustration following the dismissal of the Communist Government. They had no idea as to what would happen to the Land Reform Bill that they had worked and struggled for. They were concerned that even after the lapse of a year the President had not given his assent to the Bill. A general discontent prevailed. A rumour spread that some modifications to the Bill were imminent.

It was against this background that the Kerala Karshaka Sangham decided at a meeting at Trichur on June 1, 1960 that a *jatha* should be sent from Kasaragod to Trivandrum under my leadership. The decision to organise the *jatha* was taken as a protest against the moves to amend the Kerala Land Reforms Bill in accordance with the demands of the Landowners Association and the Nair Service Society.

The *jatha* started from Kasaragod on June 18 with myself, C.H Kanaran and P.R Pandalam as leaders. This *jatha* was a great morale booster for the entire peasantry of Kerala, starting as it did from the *taluk* headquarters of Paivellikkeyi, the native village of Comrades Sunder Shetty and Mahabala Shinnappa Shetty. These brave young peasant leaders had



Karshaka Jatha — Kasargode to Trivandrum

suffered martyrdom while opposing forcible eviction. The *jatha* set out to achieve the goal that these beloved martyrs had died for.

The march of the *jatha* through Cannanore district, the birthplace of the peasant movement of Kerala, was an inspiration both to the *jatha* members and the younger generation of the district. Remember the peasant shrines of Morazha, Mattannoor and Kayyoor. Memories arose of how at places like Kavumpai, Karivellore, Monayankvanu, Payyam, Onchiyam, Thillankeri, Korom, Padikkunnu. Vayaralayam, Paivellikkeyi peasants had fought feudalism and shed their blood for the cause. The *jatha* marched to the tune of the hymns which these struggles had given birth to.

The *jatha* kindled much enthusiasm as it marched along. It received grand receptions all along the route. There were huge meetings at Cannanore, Tellicherry and other centres. The welcome with lighted lamps and measures of rice that were distributed by the peasants to those who fought for their rights was indeed heartwarming.

Our trek from Feroke to Perinthalmanna was an object lesson of the deep stir among Muslim peasants. A large percentage of the farmers there had been evicted forcibly, since the birth of the present Government, from lands that had come into their possession fifty and sixty years earlier without any documentation and which they had improved and raised crops on. We met a large number of Muslim peasants who had been evicted by the very MLA whom they had voted in to power. The poor peasants of Mappila Nadu were deeply frustrated. *There is no hope now*, they felt.

It was this sense of disappointment that impelled them to have a look at the *jatha* as it marched along, for it was their only hope. Thousands of Muslim women peasants lined the road. Wonder and hope were reflected in their eyes as they heard the slogans and hymns of the *jatha*. Thousands of Muslim peasants and young men watched the *jatha* in sympathy. They took part in their thousands in large meetings at Kondotti and Kottappadi and in more than thirty smaller meetings. Disregarding the objections of some prominent people, they bought both openly and in secret Comrade EMS's pamphlet entitled *Work Unitedly for the Land Reform Bill*.

The class sense of Muslim peasants has sprung from a century-long struggle against feudalism. One could still see in many places in Mappila Nadu monuments to European soldiers. There is one such right in front of the Perinthalmanna Travellers' Bungalow. The Muslim peasants waged armed struggles against *Jenmis* (foreigners) who tried to extract rent and tax from them with the help of the army. And these were monuments erected by *jenmis* in memory of Britishers who became "martyrs" for *jenmis* in such uprisings. The last of these struggles against feudalism took place in 1921 at Variyankunnu under the leadership of Kunjahamed Haji. There is no memorial yet to the countless martyrs who laid down their lives in the fight for land for the peasants.

While the *jatha* was passing through Puthukad, somebody shouted, *Let AKG go to Russia*. More than a thousand people stood nearby. None of them repeated what he said. A few people with caps on their heads and with their body smeared with charcoal demonstrated at the entrance to Trichur in the

name of the Kisan Congress. They shouted *Karshaka march is a march of duplicity*. They disappeared even before the *jatha* reached them. The people who demonstrated at Chengannur near the Indo-American club with a dog carrying a black flag round its neck became isolated. How did this happen? The only reason was that the attempt to brand the *jatha* a *Communist jatha* was a failure. And the people acknowledged and identified it as a peasants *jatha*.

At Tellicherry, Kozhikode, Alathur, Mannarghat and Cannanore, we met hundreds of peasants who had participated in the *liberation struggle* and who voted for the Congress, League and PSP parties and against the Communist Party in the last general election. They had all migrated to the slopes of the Malabar hills from north Travancore. There were 10 lakhs of these peasants who had migrated to Malabar as they did not have enough land to live on at home. They sold to the rich whatever land they had at a small price and came to Malabar with the proceeds. At Tellicherry I met some representatives of about 400 Catholic peasants who had acquired land 12 years earlier by paying *manusham* (premium) at the rate of 100 and 200 rupees per acre to Karoth Sankaran Nair, a *jenmi* of Vekkulam Amsom in Tellicherry *taluk*. Sankaran Nair had sold them land in an oral deal. The hard-working peasants who were confident that they could manage with a small piece of land did not bother about documents. They cleared the forest, started raising crops and settled down there. After the Congress Government took over, the police came in vans to evict them. The Communist Government never used the police for eviction purposes.

Although the newspaper *Malayala Rajyam* had discouraged the people from meeting the *jatha* or talking to its members, Nair peasants constituted a large portion of those who lined the road from Changanacherry to Trivandrum to watch the *jatha* and listen to its members.

After a rousing reception and an exciting public meeting at Trichur, the *jatha* resumed the trek on July 13. We reached Chalakudi in the evening after numerous receptions on the way. The peasants of Mukundapuram *taluk* received the *jatha* with pop-guns and trays of flowers.

The *jatha* reached Perun bavor on the 14th evening. There were exciting receptions on the way at Angamali and Kaladi. It was at Angamali that poor people with no class feeling were sacrificed by vested interests and communal forces in their bid to topple a Government that had introduced the Kerala Land Reforms Bill. The *jatha* reached there at noon. The reception and demonstration there were enthusiastic and impressive. On behalf of the Kerala peasants' *jatha*, Angamali proclaimed in a stentorian tone that the peasants of Kerala would line up as one man behind the Land Reforms Bill regardless of their political differences. But the communal poison of vested interests appeared on certain placards in the language of anti-communism. The meeting at Subash Maidan in Perumbavoor was presided over by K.N.G Kartha, well-known as the poor man's lawyer. A sea of people waited while the *jatha* escorted by thousands upon thousands of people reached the grounds.

Accepting receptions and hospitality from many centres, the *jatha* reached Moovattupuzha on the 15th to a demonstra-

tion that seemed to shake the town, so tumultuous was the ovation! At the meeting held under the presidentship of Sri K.C Abraham, Advocate Abraham delivered the welcoming address.

Setting out on the morning of the 16th, the *jatha* reached Koothattukulam, the land of martyrs, towards the evening after no less than seven receptions and speeches of thanksgiving on the way. A concourse of peasants including women had converged on Koothattukulam from the neighbouring places to welcome the *jatha*.

The *jatha* received unparalleled ovations as it set off through our movement's agricultural district on the morning of the 17th. The reception at Kuriyanad in Meenachil *taluk* was as unprecedented in the history of that place as those at Kozha and Kanakkari. The *jatha* reached Ettumanoor at 3pm. The reception there was attended by a huge concourse. Among the receptions between Ettumanoor and Kottayam, those at Neelamangalam and Chavittuvari deserve a special mention. The *jatha* was accompanied by thousands of people as it proceeded.

As the mighty concourse entered Kottayam town, the waiting crowd welcomed them and took them to the heart of the town. It was an exciting moment. The atmosphere echoed with slogans like *Stop Intrigues and Implement the Land Reforms Bill* and *It is not possible to split our ranks on the basis of caste and party*. The concourse that marched to Tirunakkara maidan was a morale-boosting demonstration of the number of people who stood behind the Kerala Karshaka movement. The people who noted with sorrow the change that had come

over the Kerala Karshaka movement, and those who noted the change that came over Kerala within a year had no doubts at all about the future as they viewed this mighty assembly.

The *jatha* reached Tiruvalla on the 18th after having covered 320 miles. As the *jatha* entered this predominantly Christian town escorted by a huge mass of people, the crowd watched with mingled feeling. There were many receptions until the *jatha* reached Changanacherry.

The *jatha* reached Chengannur at noon on the 19th. There were receptions at many places on the way. At Chengannur there were some isolated instances in which dogs were let loose with black flags tied around their neck. After the reception and lunch, we reached Aranmula for a reception by the Karshaka Sangham at 2pm. After another reception at Kalayada we reached Pandalam.

The Karshaka Sangham workers and others were already campaigning at Adoor, Chadayamangalam, Venjaramood and other places for receptions for the *jatha* which was due at Trivandrum on the 24th. There was thus no doubt at all that the demonstration in those places would be successful.

We thus covered 425 miles in 26 days of walking, we talked to 10 lakhs of people, and sold 35,000 pamphlets. Although fatigued with effort, our weariness disappeared as we reached Trivandrum. We reached the city in the company of a vast concourse which walked along with us for a long distance. We were taken to Pazhavangadi in a huge procession. A public meeting was held. We presented our memorandum to the Government on the 26th. I returned from Trivandrum after taking part in a programme designed to stir demoralised

people to renewed effort.

How many *juthas* have I conducted in my political life? How many miles have I walked? The temple entry *Satyagraha*, the *jatha* from Payyannoor to Guruvayoor, the *jatha* that toured the whole of Kerala when the *Satyagraha* was suspended, the hunger march to Madras, the *jatha* from Kozhikode to Trivandrum for responsible government and the *jatha* from Kasaragod to Trivandrum. I do not know how many *juthas* I will march with before I die. Anyway, it is a wholesome form of protest: one that is refreshing to the mind as well as to the body. Fasts too have the same effect, and have not been infrequent in my life, both inside and outside jail.

Within a week after the *jatha* had completed its march, the Agricultural Reforms Bill was returned by the President. But even by November, 1961 the Government had not taken any steps to implement the Bill. The Government did not carry out the all important task of preparing a register of possessions in respect of peasants who had no documents. As the peasants moved the tribunals for cuts in their rent, the *Jenmis* started evicting peasants without documents from their land. They started claiming that the land belonged to them. At Nadavarampu near Cranganur a *Jenmi* thus forcibly seized the property of a farmer. The peasants did not remain quiet. They re-occupied the land. Arrests and police oppression and lawsuits began. A small struggle in Nadavarampu thus came into being. Many were arrested.

I found that peasants were on the brink of a major struggle. The Kerala Karshaka Sangham held meetings. It decided

to start a movement for 16 demands. These included preparation of a register of ownership in respect of title-less peasants, establishment of land tribunals at the rate of one tribunal for every 2,000 petitions, consideration of the claims of peasants for Government forest lands and dry land and cancellation of the lease of Kottiyur temple lands.

Collectorates were picketed in the State beginning from November 27, 1961. 320 volunteers were arrested on the first day of picketing. This was the first Kerala-wide agitation to be conducted by peasants. For this reason, this struggle is very important. From December 4, the agitation spread to *taluk* centres too.

The Karshaka Sangham made an announcement on December 15. It declared that 101 volunteers would picket the Trivandrum Secretariat under my leadership. A *jatha* comprising these volunteers started from Kottiyur on December 4. The *jatha* consisted of the following persons: Thariyakkal John; Eliamma, John's wife; Komatt Bhaskaran; Gomathy, Bhaskaran's wife; Kallarackal Thomas, and his wife Annamma; Purushothaman Pillai, and his wife Rajamma; Zacharia. They were all peasants from Kottiyur.

Karshaka Sangham leaders were arrested throughout the State at midnight on December 3. The KSTUC announced a general strike for December 16. I issued a call from Palghat for the struggle to be extended to villages also. This *jatha* created a great stir. Many policemen accompanied it. They were reluctant to arrest us. At the same time, they were not happy over the *jathas* march, creating, as it did, interest and enthusiasm among peasants. All nine volunteers including

the women were arrested and taken to Alwaye sub-jail on December 10, where there were already many prisoners. The magistrate assigned me A class imprisonment, but I declined and insisted on C class. I stayed there with the other prisoners. On December 11, the Communist Party Secretariat declared a boycott of the legislature in protest against the arrest. A *jatha* of ten people set out on December 11. On the 13th, the Communist members boycotted the legislature. There was a *lathi charge* in Trivandrum on December 15. On the same day one lakh workers staged a general strike.

We were produced before the Court. The hearing of the case started. The magistrate offered to release us on bail, but I declined, Minister Chacko summoned Comrade EMS and initiated talks aimed at a settlement. On January 5, Minister Chandrasekharan invited representatives of peasants for compromise talks. Prior to this, mass picketing was organised in December. More than five thousand volunteers participated. The struggle was withdrawn on January 5, after a lapse of 41 days, as several demands had been conceded at the compromise talks. We were released from Alwaye jail at the end of a month. In all more than 75,000 volunteers had taken part in the agitation.

Even as the work for the Land Reforms Bill was going on, *Jenmis* had moved the High Court and Supreme Court with petitions challenging its validity. The Supreme Court held that the Bill was invalid in the Malabar and Cochin region. The Congress which had already opposed the Bill while in Opposition did not care to appeal to the Supreme Court in time or to make out a case in defence of the people. On this

account, thousands of peasants who failed to move the land tribunals lost their money. Some deposited the amount, but did not get the land.

On security considerations the Party leadership was not in favour of a struggle against the Government. Even my suggestion, that a protest day be observed by the Peasant Conference in Trichur in the wake of the invalidation of the Bill, was rejected.

A conference of peasant representatives was held afterwards at Trichur consisting of the peasant union led by Father Vadakkan and Wellington, representatives of the Kerala Karshaka Sangham and the peasant union of the SSP. It was decided that mass *Satyagraha* should be offered at Trivandrum. I was in this *jatha*. None of us were arrested, although even the shouting of slogans in front of the Secretariat was banned. Following this, *Satyagraha* was offered at all district centres. It was finally withdrawn.

It was a time of strong opposition to the struggle of the Party and the Karshaka Sangham. The Government did not therefore pay heed to this struggle. Moreover, as the Party did not take any steps to enthuse and inspire the disillusioned peasants, they too were disappointed. Anyway, the peasants were still hopeful that a Government that would re-introduce their bill would one day come into being. Their hopes were realised in 1967.

Two historic peasant *jathas* had been inaugurated in Tamil Nadu on August 15, 1960. One was from Madurai and the other from Coimbatore. Each *jatha* consisted of 25 persons. One was led by Manali Kandaswami and the other by Sreeni-

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vasa Rao. The *jathas* got an enthusiastic reception at Tanjore. We thus reached Madras where we gave a memorandum to the Chief Minister. I walked nearly 250 miles with this jatha.

Equally important was the 'Plan *jatha*'. Comrade EMS and I travelled in two jeeps from Kasaragod to Trivandrum. The *jatha* was well received on the way. We sold many copies of a pamphlet entitled *The Neglect of Kerala*. This was very useful in educating the people on how the Centre was neglecting Kerala.

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More than 4000 families were evicted from Churuli and Keerithode in November/December 1963. This unfortunate occurrence came in the wake of the Amaravathi eviction. Although the peasants were unable to stop eviction in an organised manner, the Malanadu Karshaka Union took strong steps against eviction at Churuli-Keerithode. While the eviction at Amaravathi was for the purpose of providing land for the project, that at Keerithode was in the name of “forest conservation”. The Government decided to evict peasants in the interests of “forest conservation”.

The peasants came to know that eviction in Keerithode was imminent. MSP men started arriving there in large numbers, and senior police officials also quartered there. Karshaka Union leaders also camped there. Preparations for a resolute struggle were in evidence. Whatever may be the faults of the poor who had been farming there for some time, they should not have been evicted without providing them with alternate living facilities. All the crops were destroyed indiscriminately. It is inhuman to crush people who have toiled hard for their bread.

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In justification of the Government's cruelty, *bourgeois* papers of Kerala started writing editorials about "forest conservation". Forests are necessary. But whom is forest conservation for? For man. Forest conservation even at the cost of man, only enjoys the protection of the well-to-do and of those who enjoy the basic comforts of life. Nobody could have any objection if these poor people were removed from forests after their rehabilitation had been provided for. But Keerithode has, in fact, at no time been a forest area proper. Anyone who has visited that place can see this. Moreover, some even tried to interpret it as a communal problem. They started saying that it was the result of the Sankar-Chacko controversy which was at a climax at this time.

However in this question of eviction and in their general approach both were certainly in unison. It was during Sri Chacko's administration that the horrors of Amaravathi were enacted. Therefore, the charge that this was an anti-Ezhava plot of the Christians. and that all the settlers were Christians did not carry conviction. But there is no doubt that this propaganda was responsible for dissipating the struggle to a certain extent. One fine morning the police appeared on the scene to evict the peasants. The peasants met at Keerithode on receipt of the news. They held a public meeting. Comrade Manjooran and others spoke, strongly attacking the Government's policy. The police swooped on them from all four quarters and started action. After a little while Manjooran and others were arrested and removed. The peasants got angry. The police promptly began a man-hunt for the ring-leaders, and launched a *lathi-charge*. Everyone was chased

away. There was firing. It seems some were killed. This was confirmed by my investigation too. Houses were ransacked. Shops were set on fire. All the stores in the shops were destroyed. People were beaten at random. All those coming to and from Keerithode were beaten. No one was allowed to enter Keerithode. An atmosphere of terror was thus created as eviction began. More MSP men arrived.

I was in Delhi at this time. I was worried over news of the Keerithode cruelties. What was to be done? The Government was disregarding all the assurances it had made during the Amaravathi struggle. The people had to answer this challenge. It was a time of differences of opinion within the Party. Initially some were not in favour of even standing up for the Amaravathi approach. Some anti-struggle comrades propagated that I was acting on my own, impelled by overweening self-importance, without consulting the Party. Anyway I remained silent as I felt that the Party would summon me should my presence be necessary. One morning, the Trivandrum office informed that the Keerithode developments were grave and asked me to go over to Kerala. I rang up Comrade EMS in the morning. He too said my presence was necessary.

I reached Cochin the next day by plane. I had wired the Karshaka Sangham, the Party and the Kottayam District Secretary. They were waiting for me at Cochin airport. I had discussions with K.T Jacob, P.R Pandalam and Gopalakrishna Menon. We proceeded directly to Moovattupuzha. We decided to go on to Keerithode from there.

By this time many peasants had already been evicted after being terrorised by inhuman cruelty. MSP men called

at houses. They would frighten the peasants by threatening to burn their houses in case they did not quit in 24 hours. They would go to the houses the next day and set fire to them and also destroy whatever was inside them. If paddy and other things are destroyed—in this way—how can the peasant live? Where will he spend the night? But this is what actually happened.

Even reporters were not allowed to go to Keerithode. What was happening there was kept a secret from outsiders. A *jatha* under the leadership of Karshaka Thozhilali Party (KTP) and the Malanad Karshaka Union had set out for Keerithode. Its leader was peasant leader Wellington. A public meeting was held near Keerithode on the eve of our visit there. We spoke at that meeting.

We resumed the journey to Keerithode the next day. We thought we might be arrested and four or five constables came with offers of protection. We said it was not necessary. The policemen walked with us. We thus reached Keerithode. There was nobody there. Only a police camp. There was nothing except a destroyed shop, glass pieces and remnants of objects that had escaped the flames. The inhabitants had all left. From Keerithode we travelled ten miles over hills and valleys. There were some scattered inhabitants there. At Churuli the eviction was still not over. It was in the final stage and the police were still arriving. We reached a house at night. The householders had learnt that we were coming and so were waiting for us. They had plenty of paddy and tapioca and also bananas, yam and other vegetables. But who was going to take it? There was absolutely no way of transporting it. They had

been asked to quit immediately and their houses were being burnt. What to do and where to go? Where were they to get land? Would the promised acre be fit for cultivation? These were their thoughts. They were people devoid of all hopes in life. Women were crying. Menfolk were lost in thought. This was the position.

We started the journey the next morning. Comrade K.T Jacob and Gopalakrishna Menon returned. Pandalam and I continued. High hills. Some houses could only be seen after climbing a hill. To see the next house, one had to climb another hill. Such was the topography. We were weary with walking. But we got plenty of cooked tapioca as we pushed ahead.

We toured Churuli and Keerithode for three days. The authorities accelerated the pace of eviction after our departure. If only their paddy and tapioca had been sent after them the evicted people at least would not have starved. But the Government did not do even that. Even these minimal rights were not accorded to the poor. It was an unforgettable experience. We reached the top of a hill. There were two small huts occupied only by womenfolk and children. In one hut there was a pregnant woman, her sister and children and in the other a woman and her child. They were scared when they saw a constable accompanying us. The pregnant woman was under the impression that her husband was dead. We asked for his name. We found from the newspaper that we had that he was in Moovattupuzha sub-jail. We told her that he was not dead. By this time, a woman came from the neighbourhood with a little child who carried a box on his head

and a picture of Christ in his hand. They slept in the same house. They lived in fear of the police and wild elephants.

The people were being evacuated to Vazhathope. Half the land there was very infertile and the rest indifferent. Many have left that place. Anyway, we decided to hold a public meeting at Vazhathope. We went there and declared at a public meeting held then that Pandalam and I would go on fast the next day to protest against police atrocities and other grievances. As Comrade Pandalam pointed out that night, if both of us went on fast, there would be no one to attend to publicity and other work. It was therefore decided that I alone would fast.

I had promised the Party that I would not go on fast. I have no faith in fasts. It is not a correct method of agitation. It only betrays the absence of mass organisation and strength. As a method of struggle, its importance is relatively insignificant. But I believe that in certain circumstances when other methods of agitation are not possible and in the absence of organisation, the fast is a means of attracting the attention of the Government and the people.

My fast began the next day. Peasants started coming from several places. The next morning, a group of policemen came and arrested me. I was produced before the Thodupuzha magistrate. I was tried immediately, sentenced and sent to the Moovattupuzha sub-jail. The peasant heroes of the Keerithode agitation and their leaders like Manjooran were also imprisoned there. Wellington and others were arrested the next morning and taken to Palai jail. Protests began in the state. I continued the fast in jail.

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Processions and meetings were held daily in Moovattupuzha. My release was finally ordered and I was released. Comrade EMS and others came and asked me to suspend the fast which I did. The land given to the peasants was mostly infertile. All of them have now abandoned their allotments.

Peasants are going to be evicted again. It seems notice has been served already at Udumpanchola. The same inhuman tactics of eviction are to be adopted. Are there no lovers of humanity who can try to put a stop to this? Are there no public workers? Are there no peasant organisations? The reply to these questions awaits an answer which only the future can give.

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Nov. 7, 1964. The Calcutta Conference was held on that date. Before lakhs of people from all over India assembled at the Monument Maidan in Calcutta, Comrade Basavapunniah declared amidst applause: *We are the Communist Party, the real Communist Party, the real Communist Party.*

The Calcutta conference induced a new zeal and enthusiasm in me. For two years, I had been frustrated. My frustration began when the party leadership was captured by the advocates of class collaboration. I was often tormented by the thought that a quarter century of work was going waste. But the Conference banished such thoughts. To create the foundation for building up a true revolutionary party, to form the cadres necessary to push it forward, to educate and train them—I was convinced that that was the task of the day. I am proud and happy that I had a small role to play in opening this new chapter.

In a way this new chapter began with the walk-out staged by myself and 31 others from the 1962 National Council of the Party. But it was not a sudden development. That walk-out began when the advocates of class collaboration

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captured the Party leadership, denied working facilities to others and started calumniating them. There had been class collaborationists in the Party even before this but they were never able to establish their domination over the Party. They captured leadership in the special circumstances of 1962.

As we walked out of the National Council in protest against the misguided policies of the leadership, the class collaborationists tried to picture us as traitors. They conducted propaganda on these lines:

32 leaders walked out of the National Council all of a sudden one fine morning. The 32 splitters left the Party at the behest of China which wanted the Party to be divided. Whatever the difference of opinion, is not the minority bound to obey the majority? They are Chinese agents devoid of patriotism. Far from opposing the enemies who attack our country, they are helping them. They are traitors.

Revisionist leaders stirred up this false propaganda against us in order to exploit the patriotic feelings of the Party's youth wing and to create confusion in the Party ranks. But the revisionists were unable to mislead the Party's younger generation and the masses for long. The Calcutta Conference of the Party was an indication of this.

It will be useful at this time to glance over the Party's past history. How did the Communist Party deviate from the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and how and when and in what ways did this deviation reflect itself in actual practice? Only an analysis of the background can yield a precise answer to these questions.

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The period from 1938 to 1952 was a time of intense mass conflict with imperialism and the capitalist-landlord tie-up. September 15, 1958 was a day when vigorous blows were struck against imperialism. Workers and peasants joined with others at Morazha, Tellicherry, Mattannoor, Onchiyam and other places in a strong agitation. The working class of Alleppey and Shertallay conducted a struggle against the Dewan's rule. From 1947 to 1952 peasants and workers conducted struggles against capitalism and feudalism at Karivellore, Kavumpai, Padikkunnu, Kandakkai, Mattancherry and Thillankeri. They made preparations to strengthen class organisations and fight for urgent demands. The people thus realised from experience that nothing but an organised struggle against the *bourgeois*-capitalist class government can help achieve urgent demands or change the government's policies by even an iota. They discovered from day to day experience that the *bourgeois* regime was only scattering to the winds the promises made to crores of people on January 26 every year. Kerala thus witnessed an agitational zenith.

It was at this time the peasants of Telengana clashed with feudalism and the Nizam's regime in an armed struggle. A very large number of people were shot dead. But soon the Government was reluctantly compelled to accede to the slogan *Land to the tiller*.

The Communist Party undertook great sacrifices throughout India. Thousands of Communists were kept behind bars. MSP men launched man-hunts and people were shot dead one by one. The people realised that the Communist Party was prepared even to die in the interests of the toiling masses of

the country. Poor people came forward to help the Party in its days of trial and persecution. Numberless families came forward to feed and shield underground comrades. As a result of this, some families suffered untold hardships and privations.

These are impatient revolutionaries and agitators. They spell danger. They are returning to 1948. Revisionist leadership and their newspapers are today trying to make propaganda on these lines against the present as well as the old struggles. They even try to make fun of the heroic struggles waged by our brave worker-peasant comrades. Revisionist newspapers sometimes print news in a way that puts even *bourgeois* papers to shame. One is reminded of the poem *Can high tide be so high*.

One factor that weakened the Party was the failure to handle the 1952 election and the Parliamentary programme with the vigilance that should characterise a revolutionary party. The entire Party organisation was turned into election machinery, from *panchayat* level to parliamentary. Opportunist policies were adopted in order to capture votes. It was not possible to build up a well-organised party on the basis of policies and programmes alone. Alliances and tie-ups aimed at getting a majority of the votes were forged.

Some in the Party succumbed also to the desire for office. Members of Parliament, Assemblies and local bodies constituted themselves into a separate class. The craving for private property, comforts and luxuries had also spread like tentacles in Party circles. With the capture of power, vested interests infiltrated into the party. Mass organisations became increasingly weak. The class feeling of workers was impaired in the

absence of any efforts by the organisations that did exist to strengthen their agitational characteristics and to keep class consciousness alive. Instead of fiery workers, loud-mouthed people who had nothing to do with the day-to-day problems of workers or their struggles invited themselves into trade unions and held positions of high responsibility. Tribunals and lawyers were installed in the place of worker leaders. The union was no longer a weapon for class struggle. Law courts assumed that role.

After the adoption of the Land Reform Bill, the peasants organisations changed into associations of tribunals. It was not possible either to organise peasants or to uplift them from their social and economic disabilities or to build up class organisations among them. At the high water mark of this, the slogan *The Congress and the Communist parties should unite* was raised in the Communist Party.

The Party forgot its responsibility to make itself worker oriented. It did not help generations and groups newly joining the ranks of the working class to discard their old likes and dislikes and to follow forever afterwards a working class philosophy. It did not help groups inside the working class and generations that exist in the working class as various classes to resist the ideological onslaught constantly made by the ruling classes and to maintain the working class viewpoint untarnished by any alien philosophies. As the movement representing the most advanced class in society, the working class movement draws progressives and extremists from the exploiting classes, but the Party was unable to help them abandon the ideologies of their parent classes and to achieve

complete ideological and practical identity with the working class. It was still led by extremist intellectuals who emerged from nonworking class sections of society in the early days of the Party, but it then had a correct perspective of the need to work amidst the working classes and to take part in their struggles and movements.

In earlier periods all comrades newly joining the Party were duty bound to help the working class to organise their own unions and to wage their own struggles. Intellectuals newly coming into the Party would be deputed to educate fiery young workers in the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and to inspire them to action. By their endeavours aimed at the development of the working class as a class, these alien revolutionaries started integrating within themselves the fundamental working class philosophy. At the same time, the ablest and the best comrades among the workers could assimilate through this programme the basic principles of a scientific approach and to acquire the competence necessary to become leaders of their class.

But this did not last long. As the Party became stronger and as its activities spread to all classes, the old insistence on every Party member keeping in touch with the working class fell into disuse. The position of state and district units was no better. Party units at all levels were keener on maintaining contacts with other parties and general politics, including public agitations not confined to our class. The constitutional provision enjoining on every Party member the necessity of working in some mass organisation also came to be ignored. There were many Party members who did not formally join

any mass organisation, let alone work in it. Although the conversion of every Party member into a worker ideologically as well as practically is an essential task of every Leninist Party, such a change became impossible in the Party in view of the above developments.

It was against this background that the Party assumed the responsibility of being the main opposition group in Parliament and the leading opposition Party in several State Assemblies. This development which came about in 1952 and the subsequent formation of the Kerala government led to the growth of certain unprincipled forces in the Party. A firm struggle against such undesirable forces became unavoidable. Had this taken place, the opportunities that lay before the party could have been fully utilised. But somehow this duty was not fulfilled. As a result, the evils of the *bourgeois* parliamentary system spread throughout the Party.

A constant ideological warfare is a pre-condition for the ideological strengthening of the Party as a whole and of its individual members. As Lenin has said: *As founders of scientific socialism, Marx and Engels set forth the principles and programmes of working class revolution as a means to oppose bourgeois science.* Lenin began his activity by waging keen ideological warfare against the landlord, *bourgeois* and *petty bourgeois* classes. These philosophies of scientific socialism have dealt with all branches, of knowledge. They trained and educated a young generation of socialists by dealing death blows to their ideological enemies. Communist workers' parties throughout the world are today doing this on a more and more extensive scale.

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The Indian Party has failed miserably in this field. Even studying the original works of Marxism-Leninism was very much neglected in our Party. Except during the early days of the Party, there was no systematic attempt to teach the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism. The system of organising classes to give political education to young party members soon became a thing of the past. Some of these schools which had a fairly long innings had been organised on an All-India and state level. But there was no instruction provided in these schools on the basic principles of Marxism. It was claimed that an academic study of Marxism was of no use. It is certainly true that Marxism-Leninism is not to be taught academically. It should be taught in relation to the questions raised by the problems that exist in our country. This cannot easily be done by party which has closed its eyes to the problems existing in the country. In this situation, even a theoretical study of the original works would have been preferable to none at all.

These shortcomings that appeared in the course of the Party's formation and growth set it on a course of dogmatism, revisionism and opportunism. Strong protests were raised against this from some quarters. Comrades started saying that the Party was going wrong and pointed out specific instances. Protests against this were registered at Party conferences.

There is today widespread propaganda that the split in the Party was a result of the National Council's resolution of 1962 and that we left the Party under instructions from China which wanted the Party to be divided. It is also said that at the time of the border conflict, we favoured China against

the interests of national defence and that the Dange group supported the Government like good patriots. It is argued that the Communist Party was thus divided into Chinese spies and nationalists. There is now no hesitation in making absurd propaganda such as the following statement: *In any case, is not the minority bound to accept the opinion of the majority? Is that not the party's principle?* They make this propaganda to exploit the party members' sense of discipline. What is the truth and where does the basic difference of opinion lie?

For more than ten years, there was a relentless attempt going on in some quarters of the Communist Party to take the Party and the working class movement on to the path of class collaboration. Although these attempts were made at every party conference, they always ended in failure. When the Dange group assumed Party leadership in 1962, when they controlled the Party machinery, an attempt was made by Dange to impose his own policies on the Party by scattering Party's organisational principles to the winds. The main obstacle to the restoration of Party unity had always been the wrong approach of the majority in the National Council and State Councils. Sacrificing the ideological and organisational principles of the revolutionary party of the working class, they tried to impose an alien viewpoint and policies on the party, under the mask of discipline.

They tried to divide the Party on the basis of the correct Party principle that the minority should be subject to the majority, but this principle was cited in isolation from the other organisational principles of Marxism-Leninism. They challenged the whole basis of democratic centralism which lays

down that the National Council and its units should work in accordance with the policies adopted by the Party Congress that elected it. They also challenged the inner Party democratic principle which called for inner Party discussion of major differences in the Party with a view to finding out the majority opinion.

The sixth Party Congress at Vijayawada in April, 1961 clearly and unequivocally rejected the idea of a united front of the Congress and Communist parties. But the official wing of the national council disregarded this and tried in an organised manner to canvass the same idea that had already been rejected at Vijayawada. There were many examples of this not only in the statements issued individually by many prominent comrades, including a member of the Central Secretariat, but also in policies jointly pursued by the Central Secretariat and the Kerala state leadership. Among these was the decision of the Central Secretariat in March 1963 on the bye-elections due at that time. This decision called for support to the Congress in constituencies that were likely to be won by rightist reactionary parties. In the light of this, the Kerala state council tried to bring about an electoral understanding with the Congress and against the PSP, although the PSP itself cannot be included among rightist reactionary Parties and in any case was not mentioned as such in the Vijayawada resolution. Along with this, they took the political line that the socialist policy adopted by the Congress at Avadi was right although this policy had been strongly criticised by the Communist Party earlier. While this was the position in Kerala, the Party leadership in the neighbouring state of

Madras forged a united front with the Congress in many bye-elections and in the municipal election which followed. The central leadership approved this policy.

Behind this violation of discipline by the official leadership in the matter of a united front, were philosophies diametrically opposed to the working class viewpoint of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism enjoins on the Communist Party that all political problems should be viewed with a basic commitment towards the interests of the toiling masses. But the official leadership and its following have taken many steps in recent months publicly violating this principle. Some examples are given below:

1. When the Uttar Pradesh Government decided to increase land tax by 25 per cent and when all opposition parties opposed the proposal, the Communist Party there, under the leadership of Dr. Z.A Ahmed, who was a Central Secretariat Member, favoured the proposal.
2. Instead of voting against the Finance Bill containing the tax proposals of the Central Budget of 1963-64, which led to a wave of protests throughout the country, the Central Secretariat instructed the Communist Group in Parliament to abstain from voting.
3. At a tripartite conference called by the Central Labour Minister in November, 1962, the AITUC representative and Party Chairman signed an industrial truce agreement. This led to trade unions adopting policies that were not in accord with a working class Party. As

a result, it became reluctant to provide leadership to working class agitations in places like Bombay. In the Bombay Bandh and other incidents, our Party took part in agitations much later than the other leftist parties and their trade unions, and that too half-heartedly.

4. The AITUC faction in the central leadership presented a document laying the foundations of this anti-struggle policy in the trade union field. The political basis of that document is the argument that the *bourgeois* government of India, dominated by monopoly capitalists, is forcing feudalism and foreign monopoly capitalism to beat a retreat. This covered up the fact that the government was only pampering feudalism and foreign monopoly capitalism. A leadership that accepts this cannot even dream of preparing the working class for the struggle against imperialism and feudalism.

The official leadership stifled this policy on the plea that at a time when the Chinese *aggression* was on, mass struggles should be so conducted as to assist national defence. This argument replaces class war with class collaboration. For, any effort that sacrifices the interests of the toiling masses will only serve to weaken, not strengthen, national defence. A government that helps capitalists make huge profits by making use of the national emergency and a political party that watches this in silence cannot create in the toiling masses the readiness to suffer sacrifices so necessary to resist and push back the foreign troops when they intrude into our borders.

Disunity and inner party troubles grew in the Party as a

result of the Central leadership's acceptance of this attitude of class collaboration. Only a leadership committed to a policy of class war can consolidate the unity of the party. Instead of bringing about this change in their policy, they tried to take disciplinary action against those who asked for a policy of class war. Such attempts only served to divide the Party.

The official leadership did not content itself with disciplinary action on an organisational plane. It also launched a campaign of vilification against those who believed in class war. They branded as *Chinese agents* all those who criticised their political line and propagated that the leftists on the India-China and the Kashmir problems were *anti-national*. They thus tried to isolate leftists from the people.

One of their contentions is that leftists obstructed the national effort against the Chinese aggression and the needs of national defence. The reply to this is contained in Comrade Dange's pamphlet: *Our line is neither dogmatic nor revisionist*. Itself citing relevant excerpts from the counter-resolution tabled by Comrades EMS and Ramamoorthy following the resolution tabled in the national council by Dange, the pamphlet says: *In both these drafts, the slogan of national defence is acknowledged*. No one in the National Council felt differently at that time in regard to the slogan of national defence. The National Council had an unanimous opinion on the question of defending the nation.

The difference then was not on the question of whether or not the Indian Government should be backed in its defence efforts. What then was the problem? As indicated already, the difference was over the question of whether in the name

of defence, the masses should be suppressed or not. There were also differences over whether or not a mass campaign should be organised against a government that in the name of “national defence” kept more than 1,000 Party members in detention. They used the slogan of “national defence” to jettison unavoidable duties of a party founded on the working class movement, viz., organisation of mass campaigns and struggles and creation of mass movements against arrests and oppression.

What is the difference between the Communist Party and other Parties? Communists view all questions in the light of Marxism-Leninism which is not founded on narrow nationalism. Communists approach problems through a fusion of patriotism and world working class feeling. The bonds of unity existing between Communist parties of different nations constitute an entirely new relationship in human history. Its growth cannot but be difficult. Communist parties of all countries would at once preserve their autonomy and maintain unity with each other. The evidence of history is there to show that mistakes are possible if any one of them were to be neglected. As the parties of each country maintain mutual ties on the basis of equality and reach an ideological understanding through real, not formal, discussions, their unity becomes all the more strong. On the other hand, if any one Party were to impose its opinion on the other and if they interfered in each other’s internal affairs instead of following a policy of friendly exchange of suggestions and criticisms, this unity would be impaired.

Marxism-Leninism has always insisted that the interna-

tionalism of the working class should be linked with the patriotism of the people of different nations. The real national interests of all peoples demand a friendly equality among nations. Each Communist Party should therefore create international awareness among its members and peoples, On the other hand, every Communist Party should be the spokesmen of the just national interests and sentiments of the people. Communists are always nationalistic in the true sense. They will continue to be so, no matter how big or small their own country may be. Communists are not supposed to plead for the interests of their land or nation against the common interests of the working class movement. If Communists were to oppose the international interests of the working class movement in the name of their own national interests, to protect international unity and jeopardise it in actual practice, they would be guilty of a grave lapse against internationalism and Marxism-Leninism.

The National Council Resolution was a flagrant violation of the principles of Lenin cited above. The Resolution of Comrades EMS and Ramamoorthy, while strengthening national defence, also fulfilled the international duty of a negotiated settlement. It was the Dange group that jettisoned the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism. Nevertheless, they brand us as Chinese agents. They also charged that leftists were preparing for armed revolution, a repetition of 1948. This was also proved baseless.

We still adhere to the declaration made by the Party Congress at Amritsar to the effect that at a time like this when, both in the international context and within India, socialism

is marching forward triumphantly, the revolutionary struggles of the toiling masses led by the working class, if effectively managed, can bring about social revolution peacefully by making use of Parliament and by amassing sufficient mass strength to face the opposition of vested interests. But as an essential pre-condition for any activity in this regard, the revisionist nations on peaceful change should be opposed and exposed. The revisionist notions have grown since 1957 in the Party as a whole and in Kerala in particular. This was made clear by Comrade Ajoy Ghosh in his speech at the Vijayawada Congress. But disregarding this warning and forgetting that the main instrument of peaceful revolution is the organised struggle of the toiling masses, the official leadership has displayed a tendency to lead the Party along wrong lines.

After the adoption of the Defence of India Rules, the Dange group increasingly tried to turn itself into a hanger-on of the Government. Those who raised even the smallest protest against this were branded as Chinese agents. They even tried to take action against units and individuals who did not toe their organisational line.

But it was their policy and behaviour towards Comrade EMS, who for many years was General Secretary of the Communist Party and member of the Secretariat for an even longer time, that opened many eyes. The Secretariat members in Delhi early in 1963, Comrades Sundarayya, Jyoti Basu and Surjit had by this time resigned from the Secretariat. The remaining six members adopted the resolution. As General Secretary, Comrade EMS issued a statement to the press ex-

plaining the resolution. The Dange clique issued a counter statement against this after two days without informing Comrade EMS and Bhupesh Gupta who were available in Delhi. Moreover, an article up Comrade EMS wrote as editor of *New Age* was dropped from the paper while it was in the press. The members of the clique started functioning as a group in the Central Committee Office isolating Comrade EMS.

Comrade EMS submitted his resignation as General Secretary and member of the Secretariat at the Central Committee meeting held at this time and presented an elaborate document explaining the reasons for the resignation. His request that the document be circulated in the Party ranks was turned down by the leadership. An attempt was thus made to publicly brand Comrade EMS as a Chinese spy.

Leaders throughout India and more particularly in Bengal were arrested at this time, most of whom had opposed the National Council Resolution. Comrade Ranadive had been arrested earlier in December. Soon afterwards, Comrade EMS was arrested and was released after a few days, perhaps on account of international and national repercussions following the arrest of the leaders.

I set out for Kerala on the day Comrade EMS was arrested. I spoke at a huge public meeting at Cannanore. It was then that I heard P.T Punnoose's *Jai Hind* speech. The speech was full of blind hatred for China, such as even Congressmen had not exhibited before. In the name of "national defence" many leaders were arrested and held in detention. Unbearable levies were being collected all over the country. If you pleaded lack of funds, you were arrested and branded with

the appellation *Chinese agent*. While terrible things were happening in the country, the leaders did not say a word about them, but continued their denouncement of China. I wrote to the Prime Minister citing many examples of this. Using the opportunity, some Congressmen tried to get some of their political opponents imprisoned. What could be done? The position was that even the Communist Party, the Party of the toiling people, was not there to save them.

At the Central Committee meeting held after Comrade EMS's release, we presented resolutions asking for the release of our leaders and a campaign against the heavy taxes. Who was there to hear? I only mustered two votes—the introducer's and the seconder's.

I toured some states in the meantime. I asked the people to wage a struggle against some of the things going on in the name of "national defence", for the release of leaders and against heavy taxation. The Dange group did not like any of these struggles. They concocted the charge that I was trying to break the Party and that I was organising a parallel Party. They asked the control commission to probe into this. I was debarred from inter-State travel. The State Committee of Tamil Nadu ordered me to keep out of that state till the municipal elections were over. The Delhi State Committee banned my participation in a Deepavali celebration there. Sardesai wrote that I was not to enter Bombay without being invited by the local Committee.

Another allegation was that we were on the side of China in the dispute going on in the World Communist movement. Some of us had made clear in statements that this was ab-

solutely baseless. In my opinion, an approach to problems on the basis of that of the Russian and Communist Parties was wrong. Neither the Indian Communist Party as a whole nor any individual member is bound to accept the opinion of the Soviet or Chinese Communist Parties. We can never accept that the opinion of one Party is correct and that all other opinions are wrong. One should study what each Party says on every problem, examine all their basic arguments, let every Communist form his own opinion about all these, and let the opinions formed by everyone be expressed by them. From the resulting exchange of views the Party's collective opinion will necessarily emerge. The need of the day is for the Indian Communist Party to form its own opinions through this procedure. Instead of doing this, any attempt to turn our Party into a stooge of another Party will only serve to divide and not develop the Party.

Viewed in this perspective, I feel that many statements in the publications of the Chinese as well as the Soviet Parties are worthy of open criticism by ours. For example, Chinese publications carried the assertion that the Nehru Government was a puppet of foreign imperialism and all democratic movements were suppressed in a fascist manner by the Government here. This does not square with the truth. On the other hand, Soviet publications glossed over the Indian Government's class nature, its programmes and the mass resentment against it and stated that the Nehru Government was responsible for strong actions against rightist reactionary political parties. This is not true either. The task of the Indian Communist was to reject both these interpretations and act on the basis

of the Vijayawada resolution.

The attempt of the official Party leadership to project such political issues in this manner and brand a section in the Party as Chinese agents sacrifices a vital organisational principle of the Communist Party viz., inner Party democracy. Free and unfettered inner Party discussion is the only means of putting an end to controversies that arise from time to time and are apt to divide the Party from top to bottom. The Party Constitution clearly lays down that in the event of grave difference of opinion among the leadership, the Party ranks should be briefed on the dividing issues and the various standpoints and the controversy should be resolved with their help. But there, as already indicated, the official leadership failed to organise a democratic inner Party discussion on the grave differences that appeared in the National Council. When it was no longer possible to avert such discussion, the official leadership tried successively to oust from the Party all those who could have participated effectively in its programmes. They tried to disband such Party committees and isolate them by branding them as Chinese agents.

To justify their misguided policies, they tried to distort organisational principles in a variety of ways and, for example, even while claiming that the minority should bow to the majority, they did not apply this principle to committees where they themselves were in a minority. The official leadership did not fail to disband the Bengal State Council where they were a minority and turn themselves into a majority. In Punjab, a Party Conference was called without proper authority at a time when the elected State Council members were in

jail. This was done with a view to turning themselves into a majority. The subsequent inner-party organisational troubles had their origin in these actions of the official leadership which were against the clear provisions of the Constitution as also of natural justice.

The principle that the minority in a Party should submit themselves to the majority has to be respected. But in a theoretical question it is not always possible to move from error to truth merely because of majority or in deference to a minority viewpoint. In an article entitled *The Duma Seven* Lenin denounced the meanness of the seven liquidators of *Duma* who used a single vote majority to put down Marxists who were in a minority. *The destruction of the Marxist organisation by the seven deputies who have alienated themselves from the majority of workers, by the seven pro-liquidator deputies, by the seven who have forgotten that in the Duma they are only the vehicles of the will of the majority of the workers—this is what the liquidators and the seven deputies are aiming at!*

Another charge was that leftists were setting up parallel committees. But it was understood from National Council members that even as early as October 1962, four members of the Central Secretariat belonging to the rightist group had started functioning as a parallel group. As far as Kerala was concerned, the Party workers knew for certain that the rightists had started functioning as a separate parallel group. Following this, the State Council leadership gave the green signal for rightists of the Palghat and Calicut district councils to function as a parallel group. It was to be expected that this policy would be pursued in other districts as well as in lower

units. Moreover, the State Council leadership had still not agreed to hold a special Congress as laid down in the Party Constitution. This was clearly a move to hide the fact that the leadership was not backed by a majority of the Party membership. The real parallel organisation was thus the leadership which did not represent a majority of the members of the Party.

The leftists were charged not only with setting up parallel groups, but also with publishing their own newspaper. But the official leadership not only published their own papers in Bengal and Madras where they were in a minority, but also used anti-Party papers in their campaign against the leftists. The most flagrant example of this was the donation of 30,000 rupees given by Dange to the *Patriot* newspaper of New Delhi. A resolution adopted by the Central Executive Committee of 1959 banning all co-operation with the *Link* weekly was still in force. This resolution was a result of the divisive propaganda carried on through its columns. The *Patriot* followed the same policy and was managed by the same editor. The political line of that paper was that the rightist group in the Communist Party should join with leftists in the Congress and wage a struggle against the leftists in the Communist Party. Dange's offer of 30,000 rupees to this paper was not an isolated instance. The main reason why *Link* and such other papers were able to get at Party secrets was that their functionaries had close ties with the official leadership of the National Council. The official leadership that denounced the leftist newspapers did not enquire into the many and repeated complaints about all this.

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All through the history of the Communist movement, one could find the struggle between Marxism-Leninism and opportunism and the struggle between the forces of unity and the forces of disunity. Through this long drawn out struggle, Marx, Engels and Lenin studied the theoretical problems of working class unity and gave us, through their action, lessons on how to deal with opportunism, divisive tendencies and revisionism.

Every single schism in our movement certainly originates from criticism based on opportunism and revisionism and from a betrayal of Marxism-Leninism. Whoever betrays Marxism-Leninism strives to undermine Party unity. Whoever adopts a policy and programme opposed to the fundamental interests and revolutionary good of the working class and other toiling masses is equally a danger to Party unity. Lenin has said that those who seek to split the Party only protect the interests of the *bourgeoisie* by disrupting working class unity. It is the *bourgeoisie's* relentless policy to seek to create schisms in the ranks of the working class. To achieve this, the *bourgeoisie* generally plants its agents in the ranks of the working classes and buys some workers with money. Opportunists and revisionists are in reality the agents of the *bourgeoisie*. Instead of organising the working class in the struggle against the *bourgeoisie*, they have always appealed to the working class to collaborate with the *bourgeoisie*. This is what Bernstein and Kautsky did in the Second International. At a time when imperialists were concerned over the possibility that workers of all nations might unite against the imperialist war, they came forward to appeal to workers to

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collaborate with the *bourgeoisie*. As Lenin pointed out:

Social chauvinism and opportunism in its finished form, is quite ripe for an open, frequently vulgar alliance with the bourgeoisie and the general staffs.

(Lenin: *Opportunism and Collapse of the Second International*)

I was a member of the Congress from 1927 to 1939. I left the Congress in 1939. I left it not out of personal enmity, but because I learnt from experience the class nature of Congress. I bade farewell to the Socialist Party too. My reason for this was that the Socialist Party programme was anti-Communist and its members nurtured a hatred of the Soviet Union. Such a Party can only be a stooge of the *bourgeoisie*. It was only after this that I joined the Communist Party with enthusiasm and dedication. But unfortunately, a Party that flouts Marxism-Leninism and stands for class collaboration does not deserve to be called a Marxist Party. This was why I said goodbye to the Dange group too.

Is not the Dange group conducting agitations against the Government? Do they not issue calls for *bandhs*? Don't they conduct *Satyagrahas*? Yes, they do, but the Swatantra Party also conducts agitations. The Jan Sangh too exudes anti-Congressism. But the point is this. Do you believe in class and class war or in class collaboration and *bourgeois* leadership? The Resolution of the Bombay. Congress has stated very clearly that national democracy is a resting place on the way to socialism. The leadership of this transition will be in the hands of the *bourgeoisie*. To say that a Government led by

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bourgeoisie can build socialism is wrong both pragmatically as well as theoretically.

The true revolutionary unity of the working class can only be achieved by holding aloft the banner of Marxism-Leninism and its high principles. The unity achieved by sacrificing principles and by collaborating with opportunists is not working class unity. On the contrary, it is

the alliance of a small section of privileged workers with 'their' national bourgeoisie *against* the working class masses: the alliance between the lackeys of the bourgeoisie against the class the latter is exploiting.

(Lenin: *Opportunism and the Collapse of the Second International*.)

Politicians may have to suffer vilification. I was dear to Congressmen when I was in the Congress. When I left the Congress, I became a traitor in their eyes. I was the good boy of Ashok Mehta and Jaiprakash Narayan when I was in the Socialist Party. Afterwards, I became a Russian agent to them. When we and the Dange group were one, I was a selfless worker and a revolutionary to them. I am today a *Chinese spy* and *traitor* in their eyes.

The slogans that they use today to deceive the people and the Party members belonging to their group, slogans like *Chinese fifth column, traitors, return to 1948*, etc. have been repeated by Lal Bahadur Shastri, Nanda, the Jan Sangh and the Swatantra Party. Using the same slogans, the Government will try to ban the Communist Party and arrest its workers. This is bound to happen one day. The people will not forgive

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the rightists who paved the way for this. Whatever the cost, I shall go forward holding true to my convictions, and testing them in the light of experience. If proved wrong, I will reject them. I am sure that the names and actions of the martyrs who built the Party with their flesh and blood will inspire me.

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The revisionists, who at the behest of the *bourgeoisie* tried to turn the Indian Communist Party into their tool, took action against us who stood firmly for the interests of the working class. Comrade EMS was among those against whom action was taken. But the people did not forsake us. We received warm receptions from the people. The reception at Trivandrum epitomised these.

I went to Trivandrum after action was taken against other comrades and myself. A large crowd of people were waiting to receive me at the airport. I was taken from the airport to the Party office in a procession of many people and nearly 100 cars. The enthusiastic reception was an indication of the people's protest and resentment against the revisionist leadership in the Party.

I went to Tellicherry after the reception at Trivandrum and I got the same kind of reception there too. These developments worried the revisionist Party leadership. Moreover, this gave them an opportunity to think about recent developments. Still, they did not learn. Those blinded by the cataract of revisionism cannot learn from the writing on the wall.

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They not only refused to learn, but also betrayed us to the *bourgeoisie* and let out Party secrets to them. The Indian *bourgeois*-landlord Government was emboldened by this policy of the revisionist leadership to arrest and imprison me.

I was arrested on December 9, 1964. I had reached Trichur from Vijayawada the previous day. The train was only four hours late! As usual, a useless old engine somehow hauled us upto Coimbatore. It was 1:30pm when the train reached Trichur. Comrades Sundarayya, Basava Punnayya, Ramamoorthy, Surjit and Jyoti Basu were also in the train. We got down at Trichur railway station and went to the Party office for a Party meeting. It began in the evening at the residence of Comrade Aryan. Food was also provided there.

The town was filled with CID men by this time. Senior CID officials hovered around all the hotels. I regarded these just as normal preparations, not suspecting that anything unusual was going to happen.

On the 29th everyone dispersed to the lodge as usual after the meeting. By this time Susheela and our daughter Laila had arrived. We spent that day in Comrade T.K Krishnan's house. Laila slept well, happy at seeing her father and mother together. Because of heavy work I had been unable to see Laila for months together or to stay with her. Hearing that I would be in Trichur for a week, she had come to spend four or five days with me.

I could not sleep well at night. Some sounds around the house disturbed me. I got up and had a hasty look round and slept again fitfully.

At 3am Comrade Krishnan knocked at the door. As I

opened the door, I found the Circle Inspector and other police officials waiting at the doorway. They said I was under arrest. I asked for the detention order. They gave it to me after hesitating for a moment. The arrest was under the orders of the Kerala Governor. The arrest was entirely unexpected. I said after a minute, *All right, let me wash my face*, and tried to enter the bathroom from the bedroom. *There was no question of washing one's face*. That was the order of our S.B head constable Pisharady. To awaken people at 3am to announce their arrest, and then to say that they would not even be allowed to wash their faces—is anything more needed to make you furious? I became angry. I spoke against that head constable's arrogance. Awakened from sleep, Susheela and Laila were watching all this. Susheela tried to calm me. It took some time for me to cool down. I started for the station and reached there in a jeep accompanied by policemen.

Are you arresting Susheela too? I asked the police officer. He replied in the negative. *How can that be?* I thought to myself and then told myself that everything is possible under a stupid government.

Within half an hour Comrades Sundarayya, Ramamoorthy and Surjit arrived. Azhoekoden Raghavan was also there. In a little while Susheela and Laila arrived in a car. They too were arrested! Poor Laila. She was in jail before she was nine years old.

Laila asked me slowly: *Why do these policemen behave like this, father?* What could I say? She did not know that the policeman was not responsible for this, but the *bourgeois*-landlord government led by monopolists like Birla and Tata and big

landlords and their shameless agent Nanda. *Father, mother and daughter in jail: all three are preparing for armed struggle! Chinese spies!* The Government can say anything. The radio is in their hands. They control newspapers. The army and police too are in their hands. They have sophisticated equipment and methods that can concoct bogus documents. What can they not do then? Anyway, this Government will surely not be there when Laila is grown up.

We all sat in the main room of the police station from 4 to 6 o'clock, since the jail authorities wanted us only at 6am. We were therefore kept in suspense for two hours. We finally reached the jail at 6 o'clock. Narayanan Kutty Menon was still Superintendent. We had to wait in the jail also. Not many detinue prisoners could be accommodated in the Viyyur jail. Anyway, I decided that I would have to create an uproar. Nothing would be obtained otherwise. This was my first thought as I entered jail. Susheela and Laila were moved elsewhere. Laila was taken to Viyyur jail, but was later sent to our house at Muhamma and Susheela to the Trivandrum jail. After a week, Susheela was taken back to Viyyur jail. In releasing Laila the Government showed how ashamed it felt of itself, harrying young children.

This was the 13th time I was undergoing imprisonment. I did not know how long it would last this time. That depended upon the protests and organisational strength of those outside jail. Some 40 people were thrown into this small jail as detinuees. They were shut up in jail without even the limited facilities allowed to detinuees. An empty Government and a vicious anti-people policy.

We learnt from the papers, on the 30th, of the man-hunt throughout India. There were statements by many on the arrest. K. Damodaran, Kerala's Marxist "Theoretician" said shamelessly *These arrests are on an All-India level. It has nothing to do with the Kerala election. As the detainees are also entitled to contest, it will lead to a better contest.* Many persons issued statements protesting against the arrests. Among them were Achutha Menon, Dange and members of other parties. It was shown by all these statements that the arrests had a bearing on the forthcoming elections in Kerala. But our "Marxist Theoretician" was too blinded by anti-Communism to see that. Comrade Damodaran repeated what Nanda and Lal Bahadur Shastri had said.

There was a rush for the next day's papers. 600 people had been arrested in all. The largest number were from Kerala! Comrade EMS's reaction was *The food problem and the economic problem are going out of the Government's control. It is necessary for the Government to suppress a Party that is capable of mobilising the people against the wrong policies of the Congress.*

Achutha Menon's statement pointed out that while these arrests on the eve of the election were a mean attempt to save the ruling Party, they were not going to save the Congress from the tragedy awaiting it. SSP leader Chandrasekharan said, *These arrests on the eve of the Kerala election will be interpreted as the first attempt of the Congress to sabotage a free and fair election.*

This was how various parties reacted. But this was not the line of papers like *Malayala Manorama* and *Mathrubhumi*. The following are excerpts from the editorial that *Malayala*

Manorama put out under the caption *The Arrest of the Left Communists*:

Some weeks ago A.K Gopalan proclaimed in Kerala that a Government that will not resign at the Centre's behest and will not fire when asked to do so by the Centre should be formed here. This statement challenging the Indian Constitution and the Government here that came to power in a democratic election was a surprise to the people of this country. There are many indications that funds from China are being received liberally. It was reported that leftist Communists spent huge amounts of money for the demonstration in Trivandrum.

The *Manorama* is concerned over the opposition to a democratically elected government. They shamelessly write this after having supported the dismissal of a government that came to power through elections. *Mathrubhumi's* correspondent in Trivandrum, notorious as an anti-Communist, wrote the following despatch:

A high official source disclosed here that yesterday's arrest of over 400 leftist Communists was based on definite indications that they were planning widespread sabotage moves on behalf of China. It is learnt that leftist Communists had prepared a twin programme that called for pro-Chinese propaganda with a view to nullifying the people's vigilance and obstructing India's economic development. This decision was taken a month ago.

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We waited for Nanda's radio speech on January 1. We knew that it would contain phrases branding us as Chinese spies, traitors and saboteurs. We knew also that it would not contain the real reasons behind the arrest of more than 1,000 activists in such a great hurry. But we still felt that there might be some excuses in it at least for popular consumption. But we felt after hearing the broadcast as though *the mountain had given birth to a mouse*.

The detenues this time were not lodged together. They were kept at Cannanore, Viyyur and Trivandrum. Members of the Politburo like Sundarayya, Surjit, Ramamoorthy and myself were all at Viyyur. After a few months, all except myself were taken to their respective states.

As always, jail life was unhappy. Many necessities were denied us. It thus became necessary for me to resort to my usual hunger strike. I fasted first for a day, then for seven days and then again for three days. Unlike in the past, I fasted this time not merely to obtain more facilities in jail. I fasted also in protest against a ration cut.

I went to the court several times during this jail term. I went to the High Court and the Supreme Court to file writ petitions. I would be taken from Trichur to Ernakulam for this. These journeys helped to reduce the monotony of jail life. I flew from Ernakulam to Delhi for the Supreme Court writ. I was housed in the Tihar jail in Delhi. I could thus meet and hold talks with some MP's. I also met those coming from other jails to move the Supreme Court.

All my writ petitions were allowed and jail facilities improved a little as a consequence. We were released even be-

fore the first of my writ petitions was decided by the Supreme Court. This was only because of the country-wide campaign for our release.

Something else that happened at this time deserves to be specially mentioned here. Susheela was lodged in the women's jail at Viyyur. I was allowed to visit her once a week. Susheela complained about having to live alone in the women's jail. We demanded that she be either lodged with me or with Gauri Amma, Sarada Amma and others at Trivandrum. As the agitation for this began, Susheela was transferred to Trivandrum. But I was not transferred. The Government thought it dangerous to take me to Trivandrum. I wrote to Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on the unfairness of this procedure. Shastri forwarded that letter to the then Kerala Governor A.P Jain. As a result, Susheela was allowed to stay with me at Viyyur jail. One morning, Susheela arrived at Viyyur jail. It was for the first time in the history of jails in Kerala that his and wife were allowed to live in the same cell in the same jail. We achieved this through our joint agitation.

The mid-term elections in Kerala were held when we were in jail. The Congress thought it could sweep the polls by holding the election while they kept us in jail. The Right Communists also thought it a good chance to win a large number of seats. The Communist (Marxist) Party demanded that a non-Congress United Front including the Muslim League should be formed for this election. But the Right Communists did not agree. They contended that the Muslim League was a communal Party with which they would never ally. But the Marxist Party joined with the League and set up a United Front. The

election witnessed a three-cornered contest. The principal contestants were a United Front of the Marxist Party, the League and SSP, another of the Right Communist Party and RSP, and the Congress. It was a very keenly contested election. The main propaganda of the opponents was that Marxists were Chinese spies. The main activists of the Marxist Party were all in jail. But nevertheless the Marxist-led United Front achieved a tremendous victory. It emerged as the largest single Party in the Assembly. All but two of those who contested from jail were returned. But still the Marxist Party MLAs were not released and given a chance to attempt to form a Government. Comrade EMS who was outside jail was also elected. He was asked to form a government. He replied that he would make efforts to do so provided the MLAs belonging to his Party were released from jail. But the Government was not ready for that. As a result, no Ministry could be formed, and Kerala continued to be under President's rule.

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After a long spell of President's rule in Kerala, the general elections were finally held. The people of Kerala were unhappy and discontented. The food shortage continued and the Centre was unwilling or incapable of providing the people with their minimum food requirements. During this period the CPI(M) constantly attacked the Centre's policy of neglect and conducted agitations on this question. The Congress both at the Centre and the State earned the people's hatred. The country had been facing a deepening economic crisis since 1965–66 and this affected the daily life of Kerala also. Kerala is deficit in rice to the tune of nearly 54 per cent. The bad harvests and the increasing economic imbalances in the capitalistic economy led the Centre to more oppressive measures and taxation. Therefore under Presidential rule, the Congress became increasingly unpopular.

In the context of the mass struggles and the anti-Congress mood, most of the non-Congress parties were prepared to join together to fight the Congress. Our Party took the initiative in Kerala in forming a United Front (UF) with certain other parties to forge a common democratic programme to defeat

the Congress, which is the main party of the *bourgeoisie* and landlords. Parties like the CPI, Muslim League, PSP, SSP, RSP, KTP and KSP had for the first time joined forces with the CPI(M) on a common minimum programme.

While we had entered this United Front and eventually the Government with the express aim of defeating the Congress as a political force and focussing the struggle against the Centre, the other constituents of the Front, particularly the CPI, had different aims. The experience of the 1957 ministry and the history of revolutions throughout the world had taught Marxists that winning power in a state in India did not vest real power in its hands. The repressive apparatus of State power—the army and bureaucracy— was controlled by the Centre. The financial relationship between Centre and States was that of *patron and client*. In this situation there was not much scope for radical change, unless the people were mobilised by struggles to force the Centre to change its policies and the masses realised the limits of constitutional remedies. As one of our Party documents put it: *A good and essential part of state power resides in the union centre and the Congress Central Government.... Naturally, under these circumstances to speak of real political power for the State Governments, that, too, of non-Congress Governments comprising different opposition parties, is unreal and devoid of substance. (New Situation and Party's Tasks, pp. 62–63.)*

The Right Communists naturally ignored this Marxist-Leninist viewpoint. Their revisionism could only frame a policy of *clean administration* and some reform in the rotten state structure. It was this clash between the social-democratic

approach and the revolutionary approach that lay at the root of the eventual falling out of the Rightists from the united front.

Regarding the elections proper, I contested again from my old constituency, Cannanore. Earlier I had wanted to retire from the parliamentary scene. I had been a member of Parliament since 1952 and prolonged ill-health had left me physically exhausted. (I had been suffering from a prostate gland, blood pressure and diabetes for years). But the Party felt that my presence in Parliament was necessary, and therefore persuaded me to stand.

The election campaign was hectic. I toured all over Kerala addressing meetings and participating in rallies. My main theme was devoted to attacking the policies of the Congress for the last twenty years which had led the country to such a sorry state of affairs. In the elections I was opposed by Shri Chathukutty Nair, whom I defeated by a big margin of 1,15,000 votes. The United Front emerged triumphant and the Congress suffered a crushing defeat; out of the 133 seats it contested, it won only 9. The CPI(M). won 52 of the 59 seats contested. A United Front Government was formed with Comrade EMS as the Chief Minister and other parties were also represented in the Cabinet. The aim of the UF was to implement the minimum programme to provide some relief to the people and at the same time to raise the people's consciousness through struggles against oppression and against the Centre.

But the CPI soon came into conflict with this understanding. With its emphasis on *clean administration* and *constitu-*

tional reform it increasingly began placing obstacles and sabotaging united action. The Muslim League also found itself in opposition to the progressive measures introduced by the UF. The call for struggle against the Centre found lukewarm response among these parties. The UF Coordination Committee called for a general strike and *bandh* on September 11, 1967 and a total *hartal* was observed. This, despite the reluctance and sabotage of the CPI-Muslim League clique. The Central Government continued to hamper the continuous supply of rice to Kerala and the people had to undergo tremendous suffering because of the cut in rice-rations. The Congress Government and Panampalli Govinda Menon hoped that this shortage would lead the people to turn against the UF Government. But their hopes were frustrated. Comrade EMS and I undertook a tour of Kerala in 1968 to explain to the people the machinations of the Centre. It was on this food issue that the CPI and the mini-front gang later shamelessly accused Comrade Gowri—the Food Minister—for being responsible for the food shortage. Instead of attacking the Centre they trained their guns on our Party.

The Congress, in its attempts to disrupt the UF, resorted to all sorts of activities to create disorder. On August 12, 1968 when I was addressing a public meeting at Kuttiadi, there was stone-throwing organised by Congress *goondas*. This seemed to be a vengeful act as a few weeks earlier I had led a *dharna* outside the house of the Prime Minister in Delhi to protest against the food policy. All the MPs from Kerala had taken part in the protest. The Congress also opposed the September *bandh* publicly and engineered many clashes with

UF volunteers.



Demonstration outside Parliament regarding Food Policy of Govt. of India towards Kerala, June 1956

During the period of the UF, I was Secretary of the Kerala Party and toured the State in between sessions of Parliament, attending to organisational matters and participating in Kisan Sabha activities. I devoted considerable time in getting a Youth Organisation started. This youth wing and volunteer corps came in for a lot of comment from the *bourgeois* press and parties against us who labelled it as *Gopalan Sena* and branded it a serious threat to *law and order*.

Our Party with its correct Marxist-Leninist understanding gave the call for the use of the UF Ministry as an instrument of struggle against the *bourgeois*-landlord system.



Dharna outside Prime Minister's house against Food Policy of Central Govt. towards Kerala, June 1956

But among some of our supporters during this period there emerged certain adventurist tendencies on the one hand and on the other hand the prevalence of parliamentary illusions. Some who had great faith in the UF ministry and expected it to perform miracles, got disillusioned and took the road to adventurism and opportunism as did an erstwhile comrade—KPR Gopalan. For some time some other comrades got bogged down in the governmental process, ministerial duties and neglected important tasks vis-à-vis the masses. However this was corrected by criticism from the higher committees and self-criticism. Revisionist tendencies have to be constantly fought within the organisation.

With Comrade EMS in charge of the Home Portfolio, a police policy was followed which conformed to our oft-declared policy of not using the police to attack the mass movement. However this was a difficult task as various police officials continued to behave in their old dictatorial ways. In August 1968, there was a *lathi charge* and firing at Viyapuram in Alleppey. I rushed to the spot and condemned the police atrocity. Later Comrade EMS himself came down and investigated and suspended the offending police officer. Unfortunately the Court later reinstated him, which is one more minor instance of the conservative role played by the Courts in hampering any democratic advance.

It was during the UF period that agricultural labourers developed their movement further and launched many struggles. For instance in Palghat district the movement made significant gains in regard to daily wages. In September 1968, the Central Government Employees went on a prolonged strike

for better working conditions.

On the Party front, the Eighth Congress was held at Cochin in December 1968. I was the Chairman of the Reception Committee and the preparations for the Congress were ably undertaken by the State party. The rally to inaugurate the Congress was unprecedented in the history of Kerala. More than two lakhs of workers and peasants participated in the procession and another five lakhs assembled for the meeting. At the opening of the Congress I welcomed the delegates. The proceedings of the Congress enabled the Party to reformulate the political line and organisational tasks consequent to the split in 1964.

The continuing food shortage led to the calling of another general strike against the Centre on October 23, 1968. I announced this on behalf of the CPI(M). The other parties led by the CPI and Muslim League refused to take part in this strike. They made lame excuses and accused the CPI(M) of initiating violence. Actually the real reason was that they were hatching a conspiracy to oust the CPI(M) and form a Government with the Congress. On October 23, 1968, I led a procession to the Raj Bhavan along with seven other MPs and 41 MLAs. We were protesting against the neglect of Kerala by the Centre on food and industrialisation. The police removed us and they released us in the evening. The one day *hartal* was conducted successfully by our Party volunteers who mobilised themselves in large numbers and picketed Central Government offices all over Kerala.

Meanwhile, coupled with the offensive of the *bourgeoisie* and landlords, parties like the CPI and Muslim League were

conspiring to oust the CPI(M) from the Government. Comrade EMS and I had issued a warning of such an eventuality long before this, but M. N. Govindan Nair—the Rightist Communist leader—had denied it as false. At this time the Agrarian Relations Bill came up in the Assembly and it increased the contradictions within the UF. The *bourgeois* and *petty-bourgeois* parties did not like the radical measures it embodied but they could not say so openly. They were looking around for a convenient issue to scotch the bill. The CPI, Muslim League, PSP and RSP had decided to go ahead with the plan to betray the UF and form a mini-front at the instigation of the Congress. In order to do so they ganged up on the issue of “corruption”. They levelled baseless charges against the Health Minister Willingdon, a member of the KTP, which supported the CPI(M), and another CPI(M) minister. This was in retaliation against the allegations of corruption made against P.K Kunju, the ISP Minister for Finance, levelled by the news media being found to be sufficiently serious by the UF. Coordination Committee to be referred to a commission of enquiry. The Chief Minister gave the orders and the ISP minister was asked to step down till the enquiry made known its findings. This was used as an excuse to level concocted charges against all the CPI(M) ministers and their supporters in the Cabinet. The ganging up of the four *Mini-Front* parties became a formal affair in April-May, 1969. From then on at every instance attempts were made to blackmail the Chief Minister into instituting charges against some of his colleagues and to slander the CPI(M) ministers on every policy decision. The utter falsity of the whole “anti-corruption”

campaign is illustrated by the letter Achutha Menon wrote to Father Vadakkan, leader of the KTP, regarding the corruption charges against Willingdon. He wrote that the Mini-Front parties had no personal quarrel with Willingdon except that he was a faithful supporter of the CPI(M)! If Willingdon stopped supporting the CPI(M) he automatically became uncorrupt too!

The Mini-Front found itself frustrated by the CPI(M)'s refusal to fall in line with its manoeuvres and finally got the legislature to approve a motion demanding enquiry into the allegations against all the Ministers except the Chief Minister. On October 24, 1969 they got a motion passed demanding an enquiry into charges against all the Ministers. The Mini-Front could muster only fifty-three votes and therefore they had to depend on the votes of the Congress and the Kerala Congress to get the motion passed. On the other hand 60 of the UF MLAs voted with the Government. This shows the depths to which the Mini-Front had descended, in openly collaborating with the Congress. Comrade EMS immediately tendered his resignation and soon the notorious Mini-Front headed by Achutha Menon and supported by the Congress assumed office.

The assumption of office by the Achutha Menon ministry marked the beginning of brutal repression and killing of CPI(M) workers and the toiling masses who fought for their rights. The toppling of the UF was paralleled by the equally reactionary step of alliance with the Kerala Congress by the CPI. This party, notorious for its support to landlords, became the pillar of the Mini-Front and joined the cabinet. The

formation of this ministry was marked by fresh attacks on the agricultural labourers. On November 1, when the ministry assumed office, *lathi-charges* were made in eighteen places and hundreds were injured. The notorious landlord and Kerala Congress leader, E. John Jacob, also known as Niranam Baby, who had vowed to overthrow the CPI(M)-led Government, ceremoniously shaved his beard, which he had worn for the past two and a half years, to mark the fall of the UF ministry. Immediately his *goondas* launched attacks on the agricultural labourers and in one heinous murder killed Kutty—a forty-five year old woman-labourer. I went to Melpadu in Kuttanad and visited her house. The same day I addressed a public meeting where the people overwhelmingly expressed their support to our Party and proved their determination to face the new reactionary onslaughts.

The Mini-Front celebrated its victory with a blood-bath of our toiling people. Another victim was Sreedharan in Kuttanad, who was murdered by a big landlord. I went by boat with other comrades to the hospital and while I was there a crowd gathered. The whole area was tense as the landlords' *goondas* were out in force, some of them waiting outside the hospital, but they did not do anything. I proceeded at night to the house of the murdered worker, where his sister Pankajakshi was staying. She told me calmly, despite her grief: *They may kill me also—if i die, make sure my body is covered with a red flag.* I was deeply moved on hearing these words and felt a deep anger welling up in me against the oppressors. During my life as a Communist, I have been witness to numerous atrocities and murderous incidents, but every fresh injustice

instead of disheartening me, kindles in me a renewed vigour to fight for the cause of the downtrodden and oppressed.

Even during the UF Government in October, our *kisan* movement had decided that it would launch an agitation all over Kerala for the implementation of the Land Reforms (Amendment) Bill, without waiting for the administrative and judicial machinery to delay the process. In December a conference was held at Alleppey where, at a huge rally of over 5 lakh peasants and agricultural labourers, a decision was taken to implement the acquisition of 10 cents of land for the hutment dwellers, as empowered by legislation. From January 1 onwards, massive repression was unleashed against the *kudikidappukars* (hutment dwellers) struggle. It is simply unbelievable that a Government headed by a Communist could have undertaken such anti-people and anti-working class policies. Police attacks on the *kudikidappukars* and their CPI(M) supporters were unprecedented. Huts were demolished, women raped and over 50,000 cases registered against CPI(M) members and supporters for leading the struggle. Charges ranged from stealing coconuts to inciting violence. The Mini-Front had thus launched on a determined bid to suppress and destroy the Marxist opposition. Under the guise of curbing extremist violence many of our cadres were arrested and tortured. For instance Comrade P.R Vasu, a veteran working-class leader of Alleppey, was arrested and brutally beaten up which resulted in severe injuries. I was very angry and horrified by these incidents. I led a team of four MPs who visited many places where the atrocities had taken place and reported to the people what we had seen.

IN THE CAUSE OF THE PEOPLE

Our movement had to face assaults from various quarters. In Mattoor island, in Cannanore, a predominantly Muslim area, some blackmarketeers and anti-social elements attacked our people at the instigation of the Muslim League and burnt their houses. I visited the place to console the terror-stricken poor and, by visiting a number of the houses and having small meetings, instilled a sense of confidence in them.

Having established its credentials as the faithful stooge of the Congress, the Mini-Front now took the step of openly aligning itself with the Congress in 1970. The events during this period marked the complete class-collaborationist line of the Rightist Communists in the background of the split in the Congress. In 1969 when the Congress split, the CPI hastened to label Indira Gandhi and her faction as the progressive national *bourgeoisie* and extended its complete support to them. This vulgar distortion of the split ignored the class realities and was rank opportunist reformism. It provided a useful cover for their anti-working class activities in Kerala too. Our Party consistently pointed out that as far as the Congress split was concerned, it was a falling out over the tactical line to be followed between two different factions of the *bourgeois*-landlord class. We had further stated that it is erroneous to consider this split as a class schism, but it reflected the growing crisis in our economy and political system and the rising pressure of the masses who were discontented with the system.

It was with this background that the CPI and its partners, including the “revolutionary” RSP, aligned with the ruling Congress. The legislature was dissolved and elections were

held in September, 1970. This time the Mini-Front and the Congress(R) ganged up with the express purpose of defeating the Marxists. Our party declared that it was opposed both to the Indicate [Congress (R)] and the Syndicate [Congress(O)] and formed a third Front. The CPI(M)-led Democratic United Front consisted of the SSP, KSP and KTP. We also supported some independent candidates in certain constituencies. Altogether we contested 72 seats. The election results gave us 32 seats and our Front had a total of 43. Seat-wise we did suffer a setback but this should not obscure the fact that we polled 32 per cent of the votes (excluding the SSP); on the other hand the Congress(R) which emerged with 32 seats got only 17.5 per cent of the total votes polled. Our movement had grown in strength. In Alleppey and Ernakulam districts there was an increase in the votes for the CPI(M) and its allies, whereas there was a fall in the votes for the Right Communists and Ruling Congress. Our mass base increased significantly from 25.6 per cent in 1965 (when we fought alone) to 32 per cent in 1970. This was not sufficient to capture more seats from the Mini-Front-Congress combine, but we proved to the country that not only had our mass base not been eroded, but it had grown as a result of our militant struggles for the landless and poor peasants.

During the post-1967 period I had visited the German Democratic Republic and spent two months there for treatment. In 1969, I also visited Rumania along with my wife Susheela and our daughter. At Delhi, there occurred the sad death of Mrs. Violet Alva, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, with whose family we maintained very intimate re-

lations. They used to be our neighbours and the kindness shown by the Alvas to me, my wife and daughter, was unfailing. She used to give my daughter gifts and generally take an interest in our welfare. By her death we lost a good friend. Mr. Joachim Alva continues to remain a close friend.

Comrade Konar and I visited Nicosia, Cyprus, to attend a Conference of the International Trade Union of Agricultural Labour and Forestry Workers' Union. I was a member of the Presidium. We had a three-day session.

Looking back on the period since 1967, one discovers that it was an eventful and significant time for the democratic movement. The deepening economic and political crisis led to the break-up of the Congress monopoly of power and various non-Congress Governments came to power in the states including the Leftist United Front Governments in Kerala and West Bengal. Under the impetus of this developing situation, various struggles and mass movements were launched which heightened the crisis within the ruling classes and hastened a split. Also during this time, the revolutionary movement had to face the fruits of revisionism, in the form of the betrayal of the CPI and the division in the democratic forces. Despite this handicap, the CPI(M) carried forward their struggle and mobilised the masses in a big way, especially in West Bengal and Kerala. The lesson of the UF experience confirmed our understanding that parliamentarism is no substitute for the patient organisational task of building up the mass movement. We correctly used the UF Governments as instruments of struggle and the resulting expansion of the left movement and the heightened political and social consciousness of the

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masses was in no small way a result of the impact of the UF period.

Postscript-1971

The ruling Congress led by Indira Gandhi had decided to use *socialism* as the battle-cry against the *reactionaries* in the Old Congress. The mass media controlled by the Ruling Congress projected Indira Gandhi as the progressive Prime Minister fighting the die-hard conservatives and communalists. In fact there is very little to differentiate between Brahmananda Reddy and Nijalingappa. Yet the tactical differentiation forced on the Ruling Congress made them adopt socialist slogans and symbolic gestures. The Bank Nationalisation (without touching the foreign banks), the Privy Purse Bill (with heavy compensation) did not suffice to satisfy the heightened expectations of the masses. The radical slogans could not solve the basic crisis in the economic system and the increasing grip of the monopolists. It was therefore essential in this situation, with the added fear of a cruel budget, for Indira Gandhi and the Ruling Congress to go to the polls while her “radical” image remained intact.

The dissolution of the Lok Sabha before its normal tenure was therefore a ploy to maintain the illusion of the progressive character of the Congress. We had earlier pointed out that



Picketing of Peasants and Agricultural Workers (1971)

Picketing with peasants & agricultural workers

the coming Budget would be heaping further burdens on the common people. In our election manifesto we pointed out the common class character of the two Congress parties and called for a fight against both the reactionary fronts—the Indicate front with the CPI and other *petty-bourgeois* parties in tow, and the Syndicate front with the right reactionary Jan Sangh and Swatantra.

In Kerala, I stood for election from Palghat because my Party insisted on my standing for Parliament. My illness and continuous poor health made me reluctant, but Palghat was chosen as it was felt I would have to spend less energy in the campaign. However, the Palghat seat became an issue of major importance and prestige for our enemies, Concerted efforts were made to defeat me. The Mini-Front, the Ruling Congress, the Jan Sangh and Old Congress parties combined to present a united challenge. An *Independent* candidate, T.C Govindan, who was actually a Jan Sanghi, was put up. It was a curious spectacle to see the Muslim League and the CPI supporting such an illustrious candidate. Even some Congressmen could not stomach this. One M. Rajagopalan, an aspiring candidate from Palghat, issued a public statement exposing the deal made by the Ruling Congress with reactionaries like the Jan Sangh and roundly condemned the unholy alliance. Given the massive line-up behind my opponent, I had to campaign hard and visit every nook and corner of my constituency, Palghat has a history of peasant struggles and my work among the peasantry enabled me to face the combined onslaught of the opposition which ranged from the Muslim League to the Jan Sangh. At the end of the whole affair

I was able to win comfortably with a margin of 52,000 votes against a candidate supported by over a dozen parties. Similarly in West Bengal also, Comrade Jyoti Basu in Baranagar defeated Ajoy Mukherjee who was supported by all the parties ranging from the Ruling Congress to the Muslim League. In my case, the margin of victory would have been greater if we had used vehicles and other electioneering amenities in a big way, but I had decided that such expensive and wasteful means should not be utilised.

Prior to the elections, I had participated in the picketing and the agitation for quicker implementation of the land tribunal cases in respect of the distribution of Government land. I picketed the Block Development Office at Kollengode, in Palghat district, for 3 hours with 3,000 volunteers.

During the elections, the State saw the largest influx of money used against the Marxists. My wife stood at Alleppey and was defeated by the combined attack of the reactionary parties, including the Mini-Front which was led by the Right Communists, and the power of money. The election results throughout the country registered a massive majority for the Ruling Congress. The success can be attributed to two reasons: first, the democratic forces in the country were divided by the Ruling Congress and this disruption of the Opposition led to some of the parties aligning with the Congress. The disruption of the United Front and the betrayal of the CPI is a case in point. Secondly, the people voted for change; the socialist slogans found a hearing among the people and they voted for the Congress demanding radical change. The Ruling Congress managed to pose as progressive vis-a-vis the

rightist parties. Another feature of the elections was the rout of the parties on the extreme right.

The assumption of power by the Ruling Congress with a two-thirds majority in Parliament has only increased their attacks on the people. Despite its radical pretensions, it has unleashed semi-fascist terror in West Bengal to crush the CPI(M) and the democratic movement. Daily our comrades and supporters are falling victims to the knives and guns of paid assassins encouraged by the ruling classes, the Government and the police. But our Party and the movement will not be suppressed by such terror. We will grow stronger and defeat the fascist challenge. The events in Bangladesh are a pointer. The heroic struggle for the freedom of Bangladesh will have far-reaching effects in our sub-continent. In future years, the Ruling Congress will find itself thoroughly exposed and discredited before the people. Therefore it is our task to mobilise, organise and struggle. In this fight my Party has taken the lead.

I still continue to be President of the All India Kisan Sabha and leader of the CPI(M) group in Parliament. In my work, I have the constant support and affection of my Party comrades. Nowadays I have to concentrate much of my time on Kisan work. I spend a number of days travelling around the country, especially in Kerala, attending to Kisan Sabha activities and conferences. For instance, in 1971 I attended the Kisan Sabha Conferences in UP and Maharashtra, participated in various district and *taluk* conventions and the All India Kisan Sabha Conference in Punjab. I also spent time visiting various rural areas in Andhra where the poor peasants and agricultural

labourers have had to face brutal attacks from landlord *goondas* and the police. It is this activity that keeps me in touch with the masses and enables me to learn from their experiences. The plight of the agricultural poor and the landless especially concerns them. They are still bogged down in the most miserable poverty, superstition and social exploitation. But they are also the best fighting sections of our people and firm allies of the working class. It is to these two sections that my life in the last several decades has been dedicated.

Throughout my political career my energies have been primarily devoted to the peasant and agricultural labour movement. As President of the All India Kisan Sabha, I have been in active touch with agrarian problems and struggles all over the country. The biggest movement I participated in was the 80-day *kisan*-agricultural labour struggle in Kerala between June and August 1972. The peasant movement has been the main force behind the democratic movement in the state and the problems facing the rural masses continue to stem from the problems of landlordism, capitalist exploitation and an outmoded structure of land relations. Under the impact of the mass movements of the organised peasants and agricultural labourers, certain land reform legislations were passed, but always the vested interests in collaboration with the Congress have managed to frustrate these measures from effective implementation. The Land Reforms (Amendment) Act, 1969 was passed under the United Front Ministry and immediately after it this Government was toppled. The provisions of this Act still remain to be implemented by the Congress-CPI Government, and it was to force the Government to take over and

distribute surplus lands, and to mobilise the people to unleash a mass struggle that a Convention was called at Cochin on May 7, 1972.

This Convention was the logical successor of the Alleppey Convention in 1970, which made the historic call for the implementation of the right of the *kudikiddapukars* (hutment dwellers) to get their ten cents of land according to the law. This heroic struggle in which many comrades and agricultural labourers lost their lives ensured the homestead rights of over 40,000 hutment dwellers. Now the struggle was to focus on the issue of surplus lands and vital issues concerning the whole range of the rural masses like: (a) the abolition of landlordism without compensation, (b) a moratorium on debts incurred by the peasants, up to Rs. 10,000 for five years, (c) minimum support for prices of agricultural commodities which are falling sharply, (d) removal of all oppressive taxes on the peasantry, and (e) holding the price line of essential commodities. These were the charter of demands formulated by the Convention at Cochin which was attended by 1,500 delegates working on the peasant and agricultural front.

Father Vadakkan, who was the leader of the anti-communist movement during the 1957-59 period and with whom I had struggled for the Amaravati peasants two years after that, was elected the President of the Action Council. Representatives of the CPI(M), KTP, KSP, Kisan Sabha, Agricultural Labour Organisation and other fraternal democratic organisations took part in the Convention. The Convention was followed by a huge procession of the rural poor, which ran into lakhs, and a mass rally, the like of

which Cochin had never seen. At this rally we announced our programme of action to be launched from May 25, 1972. On that day volunteers were to occupy surplus lands illegally held by the landlords in the eleven districts of Kerala. Simultaneously, the picketing of Collectorates and Government offices would focus on the issues of prices and taxes. The struggle began on the morning of 25th. I set out with the first batch of 25 volunteers in Trivandrum to the Mudavanmugal Palace, where some surplus lands of the ex-Maharaja of Travancore are located. From early morning, thousands of people gathered in the city and attended a rally and then marched with us along the three and a half mile route to the Palace. All along the way, hundreds of people greeted the volunteers and welcomed us with flowers and slogans.

As we approached the palace gates, we learnt that the police had locked all the three entrances and were guarding the approaches. We decided to foil their plan to prevent our entry and take them by surprise. A quick survey was made and we approached one of the walls and started scaling it. All of us managed to climb in and once inside we quickly located the surplus land and squatting on it, planted red flags. The police flocked to the scene and surrounded us, but our volunteers refused to budge. They arrested the volunteers and then approached me and told me that I was under arrest for trespass. I told the concerned police official that he would be performing his duty better if he arrested the landlord who was illegally holding land above the ceiling. I refused to move from the spot and the police—after some hesitation— finally

brought the police van to where I was lying down and four of the policemen lifted me bodily into the van and took me to the court.

At the court, we were remanded to custody. I protested against the fact that I was given A-class treatment in jail and demanded from the magistrate that all those remanded with me must be given equal treatment. At this the Magistrate declared that I was free to go without bail and should appear in court on 5 June. I refused to leave the courtroom saying that unless all other comrades were released along with me, I would not go out. I began a *dharna* in the court premises from 5 in the evening till 10:50 at night, when the magistrate returned and remanded me to custody till 5 June.

On that day, at various centres in the eleven districts, batches of volunteers headed by leading comrades marched to the surplus lands, planted red flags and occupied them. Over 600 were arrested on that day including Father Vadakkan, John Manjooran of KSP and many other CPI(M) leaders. While I was in jail, over 1000 volunteers were being arrested every day. The intensity, scale and enthusiasm with which the movement was conducted was unprecedented in the political history of Kerala. Every village contributed money, volunteers and help in kind to sustain the movement. Women and youth also participated in a big way through the Mahila Sangham and the Youth Organisation.

All our volunteers were instructed not to defend themselves in court and in the course of the agitation over 10,000 were sentenced out of the one lakh and sixty thousand volunteers who were arrested in the course of the 80-day struggle.



Addressing crowd during emergency

In my case, I got permission from the Action Council to argue my case in court. I did so personally and faced two charges: contempt of court and illegal trespass of lands. I argued in the court that I had committed no contempt, since I was forcibly brought there by the police and had not trespassed on court premises. Regarding the second charge, I called as witnesses the Chief Minister, the Revenue Minister and Government officials to prove my case that according to the law I had not committed any crime, but had merely pointed out to the government the land illegally held by the landlord. I stated that it was the landlord who should be prosecuted and not the volunteers who had merely drawn attention to the violation of the law. The court finally did not call the witnesses, but the magistrate acquitted me of both the charges. I had spent, by that time, 23 days in the Trivandrum Central Jail. It is ironical that I have been lodged in jail at the declaration of Independence in 1947 and also in the 25th anniversary year of that Independence in 1972. This indicates that the struggles for democracy, progress and socialism are still very much the primary concern of the Indian people today.

The 80-day *kisan*-agricultural labour struggle was impressive evidence of the strength of the democratic movement. It was in this connection that I toured the whole of Kerala state for 22 days in a *jatha* along with Father Vadakkan and John Manjooran going to every nook and corner to attend welcome receptions and address huge public meetings to mobilise support for the struggles of the rural poor. This *jatha* was the third All-Kerala *jatha* that I participated in and since I was too old to walk I went in a jeep. The love of the people

and their militancy for the cause has infused me with energy and determination. In the driving rain of the monsoon in Kerala, lakhs of people heard our message and exhibited their solidarity. I have had similar experiences in Andhra and Tamil Nadu in the course of the year while participating in agrarian struggles.

For over four decades I have participated in and been moulded by the struggles of the people for freedom and social justice, and against exploitation. This has been the dominant theme in my life since I joined the Independence struggle in the 1920's. The struggle for Socialism has pre-occupied me since and the experience of fighting with the people and learning from them has inspired me to go on. The story of my life is part of the history of the millions of my countrymen who will one day march decisively on the road to revolution and socialism.

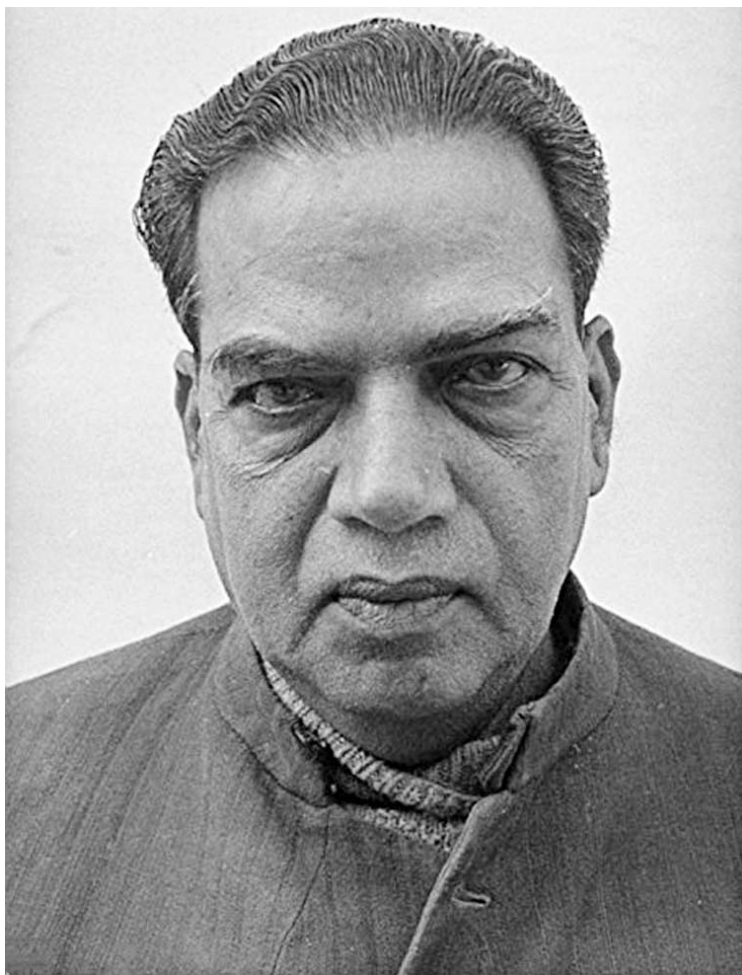
About Author

Ayillyath Kuttiari Gopalan, popularly known as A. K. Gopalan or AKG.

He was an Indian communist politician who was a member of Congress Socialist Party (Socialist wing of Indian National Congress) to Communist Party of India (CPI) to Communist Part of India (Marxist) aka CPI(M)/CPM that split off from CPI as it started collaborating with economic rightwing elements (Indian National Congress) in Indian Politics.

He was one of 16 Communist Party of India members elected to the first Lok Sabha in 1952. Later he became one of the founding members of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

ABOUT AUTHOR



A. K. Gopalan

Epilogue

This is slightly modified version of original. Slightly augmented with abbreviations, additional images & change of emphasis to add more context without changing the meaning in any significant way.